Lilith

the independent Jewish women's magazine

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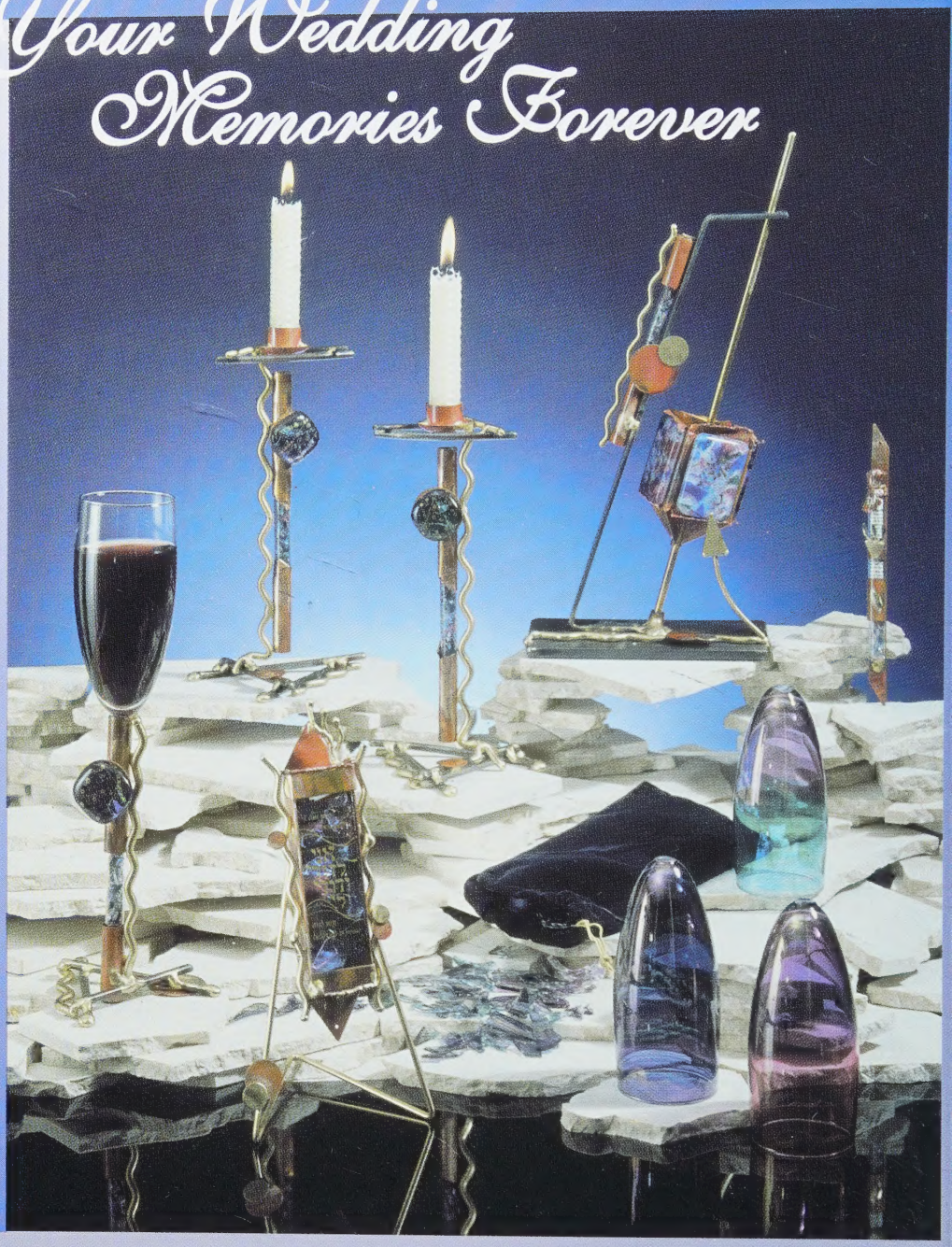

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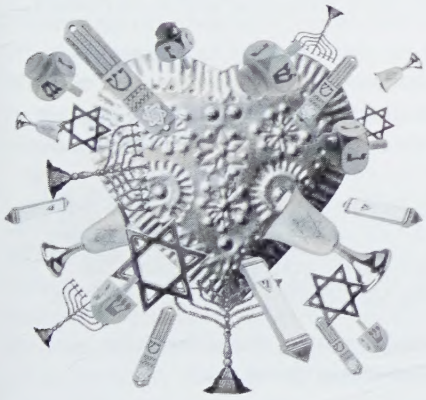

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from the editor

Oh, it's the F word, wearily, and again.

After my speech to a conference of Jewish college women in Ann Arbor recently, the undergraduate organizer confessed that wording of the original name of the gathering had been changed from "Jewish feminists" to "Jewish women." The emotional charge of the discussion which followed, I realized, was emblematic of the current ambivalence over how we name ourselves and how we want others to see us.

A faculty member in her late thirties stood up, astounded by the news that young women had threatened to stay away from the conference in droves if the chair (a woman who had been calling herself a feminist since high school) stuck with the original nomenclature. "I can't believe what I'm hearing. Among the women I know, feminist is a badge of honor." But the undergraduates surrounding her made it clear that to be known as a feminist in many circles was to be labeled a man-hater, or worse.

Fear of feminism.

And then a woman in her early twenties spoke, with a poignant honesty that refreshed the discourse considerably and redefined its terms: I attended an all-girls private school until I came to college, she said. We were told every day that we could be anything we wanted to be: presidents and CEOs of corporations, political leaders, anything. Then, at our high school graduation several of us dressed up as "feminists," mockingly. We wore combat boots and oversize denim overalls and ugly hair. Now, six years later, I am ashamed. I look back at that day and I ask myself, how we could have been so disparaging of the movement that made it possible for us to believe all those things we were told we could be? "Without feminism," she announced to the group, "none of the dreams we had for ourselves would have been possible."

I was reminded of these words when a debate intruded on me via e-mail last week, showing how misguidedly scary the word feminist has become to some women. I'm part of a small group creating programs on Jewish women's issues in Washington, D.C.—discussion groups, films, a healing service, a seder. The usual, I thought. But—lo and behold—in the planning for this year's seder (the second annual…) one of the organizers posted this question:

<< "Feminist" Seder or "Women's seder"?... We are strongly inclined to replace the "F" word with "women's." I have spoken with several people who did not come to seder last year because they were put off by the "feminist" term even though they are very strongly "pro-woman." It seems that the "F" word may put some women off, whereas the "women's" term includes everyone. >>

My first instinct was, I don't even have to reply. For decades now women across the country have been holding community-wide feminist seders and the sky has not fallen in. Ma'yan's New York feminist seder regularly sells out its 1,500 seats months in advance. Surely I (drowning in unanswered e-mails, snail mail and phone message slips) can sit this one out and let others make the case.

The first response to the posting came in only minutes later:

<< The change to women's instead of feminist is an excellent one. Depending on how one defines feminist, it could have very negative connotations. >>

followed by:

<< Though we certainly represent some ideas that could be labeled "Feminist," I feel that it is a word that has such strong reactions, both positive and negative, that it could make some women feel excluded and keep them from attending. >>

These were not college students, but seasoned community activists. Just as I realized that I had better enter the fray came this riposte from Professor Myra Goldenberg:

<< I have equally strong feelings for the word "feminist." To hold a seder for women is feminist. To drink from Miriam's cup is feminist. To declare ourselves entitled to ritual and to write and rewrite that ritual to reflect our experiences is feminist. To fear to stand up to who we are and what we are is to surrender to patriarchal values that we renounce by the very act of holding a seder.... Our seder is actually a political act, feminist in its process as well as its content. Why hide it?

<< There is another issue as well. Some women fear the feminist is synonymous with lesbian. If that is so, then we are obliged to keep the feminist label if only to include our lesbian sisters. When the revolution indeed happens — that is, when we are really free to claim our identities as women, straight or gay — then we won't need the word feminist; 'women' will do. Judaism is far from such freedom for women and that is why we need the word "feminist." >>

which was followed by the posting that in its illogic gave me hope that we indeed had reason on *our* side:

<< It might be a good idea to read through the aiches chayil, or woman of valor song that is sung each Friday night to the wife by the husband. This song embodies everything a woman could possibly be and more.

<< And she is woman, not feminist. A feminist has an agenda. A woman of valor is an extraordinary Jewish woman in the best sense of the word. I rest my case. >>

I decided overwork was no defense. I had to reply. I had been offended, as I always am when the Woman of Valor, busy giving charity with an outstretched hand, treating her servants justly, dealing real estate (an honorable Jewish women's profession even back then) is misconstrued as the apogee of compliant womanhood. I could keep still no longer. So I posted:

<< This discussion over how we NAME ourselves gets to very important root concerns over our mission. Our not using the word feminist feels to me an utter capitulation

that obliterates 30 years of the contemporary women's movement, and the Jewish feminist movement, and allows others to confiscate our strength.

BTW [by the way], I think it's a little absurd to say that Ayshet Chayil was not a feminist! She also didn't know from women's tallitot, or oranges on the seder plate, nor could she have (without 20/20 foresight) envisioned the strong women who came after her, including those religiously observant women who have proudly created the Jewish Orthodox FEMINIST Alliance which deals with urgent Jewish women's issues–divorce laws, equality of education, and more, from a feminist perspective. >>

I hit "send" before I realized I had plenty more to say, some of which was:

<< Calling this event a women's seder has many disadvantages. For one, it suggests a return to the "warehousing" of Jewish women in separatist religious events. The label "women's seder" does not suggest that women now feel entitled to claim/reclaim the religious traditions of Judaism from which we have in the past been excluded.

For another, it excludes men altogether. A feminist seder suggests that there can be male feminists too. Since we live in a world which includes men, limiting ourselves by the timid terminology of a "women's" seder (not because we are proud womanists but because some are fearful of, as the first posting coyly put it, the F word) loses us the opportunity of doing a little egalitarian education for the few guys who might show up. A lost chance to do a mitzvah! >>

The power of naming is very real—look at Adam and Eve (and even Lilith) in the Garden of Eden. Look at Jewish superstition, which has it that when faced with a dangerous situation (illness, say) you change your name to turn away the evil eye. Being able to name ourselves ideologically is very empowering.

If we pretend not to acknowledge the power of calling ourselves feminists, if we do our repair-the-world work as "just" women, we hide an important part of our own recent history. Marie Wilson, president of the Ms. Foundation for Women, suggests we carry a rubber stamp, and every time we read of gains being made by women we can mark the report with the imprimatur: "This Change Brought to You by Feminism."

So what is the seder going to be called? The name the committee chose is The Second Annual Feminist Seder—For All Women. And as I was trying to decide if the label was a brilliant compromise or a cop-out, I received, with accidentally perfect timing, this e-mail definition from someone I don't know, on a listserve completely unconnected to the seder:

<< "I have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is; I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat." — Rebecca West, 1913. >>

Susan

—Susan Weidman Schneider

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple... The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

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Anne Frank—A Girl for All Times

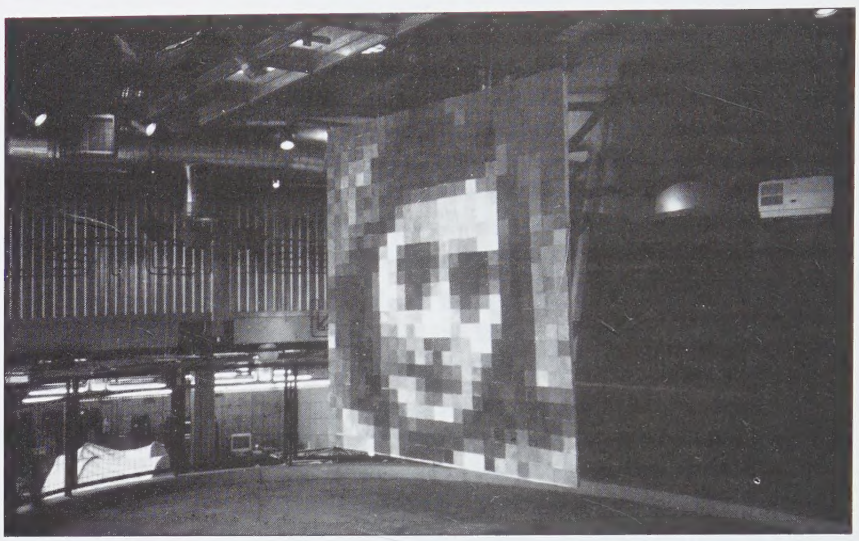
"Would she have become our female Elie Wiesel?"

June 12, 1999, would have been Anne Frank's 70th birthday. I always felt connected to Anne, and realized, as I matured, that I was hardly unique in this. Anne's diary emerges from one of the most significant events of the century, and endures as one of its most potent records. So I expected 1999 to bring at least some public commentary on the significance of Anne Frank.

What might Anne have become had her secret annex not been discovered, had she not contracted typhus at Bergen-Belsen and had she survived? Would the diary she was so determined to publish merely join the vast libraries of Holocaust literature? Or was she, who so desired to "be useful and give pleasure to people....to go on living after [her] death," destined for fame? Would she have been satisfied with being a wife, a mother, a journalist? Or would she have become our female Elie Wiesel?

It is difficult to imagine an aged Anne, for she is frozen as a girl, beaming childishly in the famous photo that graces her diary's cover. In fact, she has become the quintessential adolescent girl. Anne is a self-described "bundle of contradictions": childlike in her exuberance, but mature in her thoughts; amiable and warm but too honest to feign affection; both excited and confused by her budding sexuality. Extremely sociable, she also yearns to become "what I could be...[if] only there were no other people in the world." Yes, Anne "still believe[d] that people are really good at heart," but she remained disappointed by humanity. And Anne was equally self-critical, despite her conviction that she was special.

While the 70th anniversary of her birth was not officially commemorated, the century did close with renewed interest in Anne. In 1995, Doubleday published the definitive edition of her diary, with new details about Anne's sexuality and critical comments about her mother. "Anne Frank Remembered," which won the 1996 Oscar for Best Documentary, offered new insight into the real Anne. An adaptation of the original, Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, incorporating these new elements, was brought to Broadway in 1997. The first full biography of Anne, by Melissa Müller, in 1998 added dimension to a girl who has become part of our mythology. (Müller captured headlines with her discovery of who betrayed the Franks to the Nazis and her finding the final pages of Anne's diary.) Time magazine selected Anne as one of its 20 "icons of the century" in its millennial windup. And this January saw the release of *Anne Frank: Reflections on Her Life and Legacy* (University of Illinois Press), an anthology exploring the many historical interpretations (and sometimes distortions) of Anne's life.



STEPHANIE SNYDER

A digitized Anne Frank in reds and pinks took pride of place when a Levi's store in San Francisco sponsored an installation by artist Stephanie Snyder. Anne Frank is "a girl who exists in black and white, smiling her virginal smile," Snyder said. "I recrafted her image in vibrating red color....I wanted to remake her as a person to be reckoned with."

Also this January, the diary was taken on by the New York Youth Theater, a company that produces plays relevant to young people. According to director Lawrence Axmith, one of the troupe's main selection criteria is that the play must "hold a universal truth" and "say something about kids to kids."

Ronete Levenson, a student at the Solomon Schechter High School in Manhattan who shone as Anne in the NYYT production, relished the opportunity to play a dream role. The granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, Levenson first read the diary when she was 12 and always felt a connection to Anne who was "just incredible, but also just a girl."

Levenson is not the only Jewish actress to connect to Anne. Natalie Portman, who played Anne in the Broadway revival, wrote in Seventeen magazine: "[The diary] made me feel as if someone understood me." Winona Ryder, who has recorded an audio version of the diary, identified Anne as the tragic historical heroine she would "love to have played" in a recent issue of Allure. Millions of copies of the diary have been printed in over 50 languages, making it, after the Bible, the second-most read book. Her impact on adolescents, girls, Jewish girls, is particularly great.

Anne's diary made her an icon, but it's neither her iconic stature nor her world-wide fame that draw us to her. Through her diary's rich and quotidian details she remains one very real girl, connecting to us personally from generation to generation. Perhaps we'll appropriately honor the world's most famous adolescent on her 75th.

—Jeannie Rosenfeld

A Small-Screen Roundup of Who's a (Female) Jew

Women are featured prominently in television series more than ever this season. How are the Jewish characters faring?

Among the shows popular with teen girls, only the cleverly written "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" has a regular Jewish character, the scholarly witch-in-training Willow Rosenberg, played by Alyson Hannigan. She has bemoaned having to sneak to a friend's house to watch "A Charlie Brown Christmas" and is clearly uncomfortable brandishing crosses to deter vampires. But her Jewishness has lessened as she's gone off to college this season.

THE WB/KWAKU ALSTON

Alyson Hannigan, as Willow Rosenberg.

Jews have made only quizzical appearances in the new twentysomethings shows. In "Jack and Jill," executive producer Randi Mayem Singer suddenly wrote in Bartholomew "Barto" Zane as Jewish. His ne'er-do-well best friend warns Barto about his snobby, cold, rich intellectual parents meeting his sexy new girlfriend: "Some things do not mix: precious sons in med school and blonde *shiksa* dancers." And Kevin Williamson's "Wasteland" featured a bright, aggressive brunette who was therefore assumed to be Jewish by a guy seeking a date for Yom Kippur. The show was quickly cancelled. Mostly, if the new Jewish women on TV actually called themselves Jewish, they would be the most attractive and sexiest Jewish women on TV yet. But if you flip channels for a moment, you'll miss the clues to their ethnic identity.

One new Jewish character this season is used—true to TV tradition—for comic relief: well-meaning lawyer Danni Lipton, played by Julie Warner, on "Family Law." However, breaking with small screen history of the sexless Jewish woman (the frigid archetypal Lilith on "Cheers" and "Frasier"), Danni is given sexual and romantic diversions.

The most prominent character of Jewish background this season is Lily Brooks Manning on "Once and Again," developed by the creators of "thirtysomething" to explore fortysomethings groping for romance amidst divorce. Lily is played by Sela Ward. Lily's ex-husband Jake, who took over her father's restaurant with its predominantly Jewish clientele, could be Jewish, but their daughters have had no Jewish education and question their grandfather's Yiddishisms. Lily did light a menorah and exchange Hanukkah presents before setting up her Christmas tree.

So while the good news is that Jewish women this season are visible, they have only a smidgen of Jewish identity and do not, of course, date Jewish men.

—Nora Lee Mandel

Unearthing the Gems of Feminist Scholarship

Where can you find Hasidic girls, feminist theologians, and Israeli settler women all being discussed? At the Jewish Feminist Research Group, sponsored by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side, in Manhattan. Open to the public, each monthly meeting of the JFRG (co-sponsored by the Jewish Women's Studies Program at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the CUNY Center for the Study of Women and Society, and Hebrew Union College) offers a peephole onto the work of Jewish women scholars—well-known academics and graduate students alike—with responses from other experts. Among recent speakers:

Judith Plaskow (professor, Manhattan College.) In "Decentering Sex: Rethinking Jewish Sexual Ethics," Plaskow explored the ethics of sexual behavior. For Plaskow, to "decenter" sex means to create a new Jewish feminist sexual ethic by including texts that deal not only with sexuality but also with ethical relationships, community and social justice. For example, she cites: "Be kind to the stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt" as a line that invites even the marginalized to form new Jewish sexual norms.

Ayala Fader (doctoral candidate, NYU), "Practicing Style: Cultural Diacritics of Difference in a Hasidic Community in Boro Park, Brooklyn." Fader argues that modesty, language choice and education are all related in Boro Park. Hasidic girls resist the communal language choice of Yiddish by speaking English among themselves. This is tacitly tolerated while deviance in modesty regulations are not. The girls generally accept this, partly because of their own ambivalence to the "modern" world. The community justifies its allowance of this deviance by claiming that in speaking English, girls reproduce the practices of their mothers. This choice also reinforces the difference between males and females. (Elite Ben Yosef, a doctoral candidate, Hofstra University, compared the Hasidic girls to African-American children who resist white culture by speaking Black English in school.)

The number of Jewish feminist scholars is burgeoning and chances are you can find one near you who might want to give your group an advance look at her research. To find out about past and future presentations at Ma'yan, call 212-580-0099; e-mail susan@mayan.org or go to www.mayan.org. To find scholars near you, contact Professor Hasia Diner, co-chair of the Women's Caucus of the Association of Jewish Studies, at hrd1@is4.nyu.edu.

—Susan Sapiro

(Susan Sapiro is a program associate at Ma'yan and coordinator of the JFRG.)

Activist Creates Sister-Synagogue Ties With Cuba

For nearly 500 years, Jews in Cuba have been putting down roots, creating a flourishing religious and cultural life. Since the establishment of Israel and the Cuban Revolution, however, the population has dropped dramatically: down to 1,700, from 25,000 in 1945. The recent history of the Cuban Jews has been a complex one, negotiating religious observance within a Marxist framework, and working to keep the community involved in Jewish life.

Struck by the eagerness for Jewish education in Cuba, American June Safran has founded the Cuba-America Jewish Mission as a means for American Jews to help fill that need.

"We want to strengthen people who know they are Jewish but don't know what that means," she said. In a country where more than 90% of marriages involving Jews are interfaith, many non-Jewish spouses have also "fallen in love" with Jewish practice, but lack the knowledge and resources—prayer books and Torah scrolls among them—to continue along this path. Through ties initiated by Safran, several San Francisco Bay Area congregations maintain a sister-synagogue relationship with those in Cuba. They make regular visits, teaching Hebrew as well as learning Ladino songs and traditions.

Religious observance in Cuba is diverse: Sephardic and Ashkenazic, traditional Orthodox and egalitarian Conservative, urban and rural. Within each of these communities, the women play a central role, as synagogue presidents, leaders of committees and educators. To gird women's efforts, Safran says, "we want to help bring the religious traditions into the home—not just in the synagogue. Home celebrations and daily rituals of all kinds, little things like *mezzuzot* and Hanukah menorahs, are needed in order to remember that God is a part of our daily life. The more resources the women have, the stronger the family becomes." —*Sarah Wallis*

June Safran, The Cuba-America Jewish Mission, (510) 526-7173; www.jewishcuba.org/cajm. Or in New York: Edan Unterman, Committee for Cuban Jewry, (212) 687-6323.

LILITH Editor Honored in the Knesset

Marking the 15th anniversary of the Israel Women's Network and the landmark 1984 American Jewish Congress Jerusalem dialogue "Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman," the two organizations honored Jewish women activists at a ceremony in the Knesset in January. Among the "Women Who Made a Difference" was LILITH's Editor-in-Chief Susan Weidman Schneider, a participant in the 1984 dialogue. LILITH board members, authors and supporters were heavily represented among the eleven Americans credited with changing the landscape for Jewish women: philanthropists Barbara Dobkin, Leona Chanin and Virginia Snitow; authors Betty Friedan, Blu Greenberg, Francine Klagsbrun and Letty Cottin Pogrebin; community leader Jacqueline Levine; the late Bella Abzug; and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Podium Pairings

When the New Israel Fund organized the conference "Women and Politics: Navigating from Advocacy to Policy" last December, they surely predicted heavy-duty discussions of how to move women into legislatures, lobby for women's issues, and change laws both in the U.S. and Israel. What they couldn't have predicted was the most memorable moment of the six-hour evening of panels and workshops. The ambitious New York program featured women activists and leaders from both countries, including Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Members of Knesset Colette Avital and Hussniya Jabarra. After Avital described the difficulties she faced as a female diplomat and political figure in Israel, Jabarra, the first Arab woman to have a Knesset seat, was to have spoken on parallel issues. The moderator announced that,

JOAN ROTH

Jabarra, left, and Avital.

"because Hussniya says her English is not so fluent, she would like to ask Colette to translate for her." Audience members, expecting Jabarra to speak in her native Arabic, instead listened to her tell in flawless Hebrew her experiences as a girl and ambitious young woman in a restrictive culture. As the two women leaned toward each other on the podium, Avital rendered into English Jabarra's first-person narrative, and the scene provided a small-scale emblem of the coexistence efforts the New Israel Fund works to create.

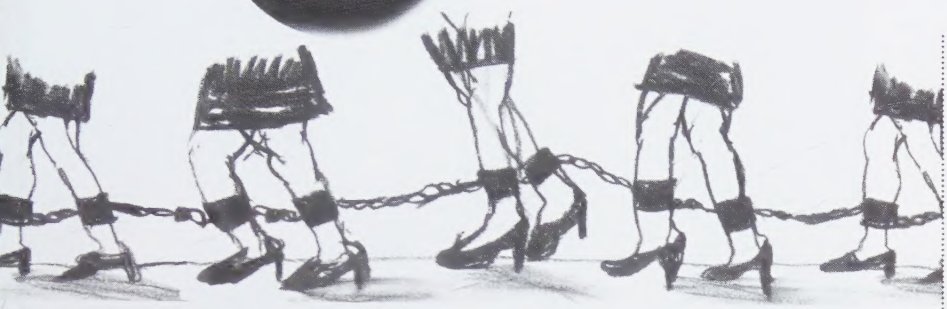
And on another podium…The United Jewish Communities' General Assembly (the largest annual gathering of Jews) met last November in Atlanta, bringing two notable women to address a spellbound audience of about 3,000. In the past, the G.A. (as it is always referred to in Jewish organization-speak) has habitually spotlighted male speakers, most often rabbis who lectured in their loudest homiletic style. This time a packed house was treated to a Canterbridgean-accented, articulate and direct analysis of Jewish life today by Alice Shalvi, rector of the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem. She was followed by the dulcet-toned Rabbi Shira Milgrom of Congregation Kol Ami of Westchester, who reminded us of how too often we fail to acknowledge what's good in our lives. The women sounded to their rapt listeners *very* different from the male speakers who'd been exhorting us at the G.A. for years.

—*Susan Weidman Schneider*

כתב עת פמיניסטי

SELECTIONS FROM NOGA, ISRAEL'S FEMINIST MAGAZINE

This page is the fourth in a series that highlights Noga, which has been publishing for 20 years and is edited by Rachel Ostrowitz, Mira Ariel, Rachel Giora, Erela Daor, and Miri Krasin and funded by U.S./Israel Women-to-Women. LILITH believes it's important to hear about Israeli women's views directly from their own feminist publication. These summaries, prepared and translated by **Naomi Danis**, are from Noga's Winter '99 issue, #37.



THE FLESH TRADE: AROUND THE WORLD AND IN ISRAEL

Several articles in this issue focus on the trafficking in women, its global dimensions, and what some organizations and governments are doing about it.

Based on a report prepared by **Martina Vandenberg** with the help of **Noga Applebaum** for the Israel Women's Network, Noga's **Mira Ariel** writes about the flesh trade in Israel:

About one quarter of the prostitutes in Israel are imported. An estimated 1,000 women arrive in Israel for this purpose each year, and 70% of the prostitutes in Tel Aviv come from the former Soviet Union. Other countries of origin include the Baltic States, South Africa, and the Dominican Republic.

Most of them are in their 20s, a few are minors. The vast majority are not aware in advance of the prison-like work conditions: the numbers of clients they must service, the unending hours of work, sleep deprivation, the little if any pay, the poor living conditions, and complete lack of freedom of movement.

There are reliable testimonies that these women are held in brothels against their will. Some are beaten and raped by gangs specializing in robbing them of their self esteem until they believe that prostitution is their only way out. Some are drugged for this purpose. A few "disobedient" women have been murdered.

Their illegal status in Israel gives these women no right to police protection. They live under threats by organized crime rings. They don't speak Hebrew. They are far from their families. They are charged huge sums for tickets to Israel and falsified documents which are held by their procurers, then they are fined for "infractions" such as staying too long with a client or attempting to run away. The constant accumulation of debts makes their slavery unending.

Experts say the police are well aware of the situation and have an unwritten agreement to protect the pimps in exchange for information about criminal activity not connected to prostitution ("and doubtless thought to be more severe that than the violent enslavement of women"). According to the Russian Consulate in Israel, the pimps are the ones who call the police to come arrest their prostitutes and thereby they escape paying the women the money they owe them at the end of their "contract."

It is likely that trade in forced prostitution in Israel comes to about half a billion dollars a year. A prostitute earns her pimp about $50,000 to $100,000 a year, but will see only 10-20 shekels per client, if anything.

This problem in Israel has caused a stereotype of "young woman from the former Soviet Union equals prositute" which has negative effects on hundreds of thousands of new immigrants.

Subscriptions to Noga are $38 for four issues airmail; $30 surface mail; in Israel 100 NIS. Noga, P.O.B. 21376, 61213, Tel Aviv, ISRAEL. noga_mag@shani.net

This page is brought to you with the generous support of George and Mildred Weissman and the Weissman Family Foundation.

INFERTILITY TREATMENT ETHICS

Recent reports on the death of a Haifa doctor from complications following fertility treatments, as well as rising premature births in Israel and the inadequate care facilities for premature babies, writes **Deborah Greniman,** ought to sound an alarm about women's health issues.

Fertility treatments are a means of controlling women's bodies, she writes, and making the treatments available has wide-ranging support from the medical and religious establishments and the national ethos, as well as from women themselves who seek treatment.

Fertility treatments, associated with 20% of all premature births in Israel, are causing a rise in premature births, overcrowding intensive

care nurseries. Since 1993 the percentage of premature births in Israel rose by 40% as compared to a 15% rise in the total birth rate. Often the numbers of premature babies needing intensive care exceeds by 30%-50% the number of incubators. This can cause disability or irreversible damage and even death. The ratio of premature babies to medical staff with appropriate specialized training is, in Israel, one of the highest in the world.

Fertility treatments are available in Israel almost without limitation. The question is: What price are we willing to pay—in the health of women and newborns, and others—in order for women to become pregnant? Certainly some price, says Greniman. but not any price.

18th Century Iraqi Torah for Women

There was much to celebrate at Drisha Institute this past October. Dancing, klezmer music and hundreds of singing voices heralded the arrival of a Torah scroll to its new permanent home.

Founded in 1979 by Rabbi David Silber, Drisha pioneered classical Jewish text study for women. Making history once again, Drisha is the first American women's educational center to receive its own Torah scroll, a milestone because women traditionally were denied access to Torah scrolls in public prayer. Blu Greenberg, activist and author in the areas of feminism and Orthodoxy, donated it with her extended family in memory of her father, Rabbi Samuel Genauer.

The Torah scroll originated in Baghdad 150-200 years ago. Its journey to Drisha began prior to the Persian Gulf War, when it was among many Torah scrolls confiscated in Iraq. After an arduous trip to Israel, the scroll was repaired by a scribe in Jerusalem, then transported to America.

JOAN ROTH

The women of Drisha make history as they receive their own Torah scroll.

"All the pieces are beginning to come together in my mind and in my heart," reflected Greenberg at the dedication. "What it means to ransom a Sefer Torah stolen by a tyrant and destroyer and restore it to loving use, what it means for there to be a Drisha to want a Sefer Torah."

Many women at the celebration had never held a Torah scroll before and were deeply moved by the experience. Devorah Zlochower, Drisha's Director of Full-Time Programs, danced with her two young sons. "It was clear from the happiness on people's faces and the way they were dancing with the Torahs that Drisha has entered a new level of growth."

Lisa Schlaff, a former full-time Drisha student and a granddaughter of Rabbi Genauer commented, "It is my hope that this Sefer Torah...will serve as a reminder to all of us that study and prayer do not have to remain separate entities."

"This generation carries in its mind the image of thousands upon thousands of Sifrei Torah trashed, trampled and burnt by the Nazis," said Greenberg. "The idea of redeeming a Torah that belonged to a once vibrant Jewish community is very poignant."

—Lisa S. Taubenblat

(Lisa Taubenblat was formerly the Program Assistant at Drisha Institute for Jewish Education.) ■

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Powerful Dolls!

Your dreams keep getting better every issue. Hire those interns, Naomi Goodman and Susannah Jaffe, permanently! "Dolls to Live By," in the Fall 1999 issue, so creative and well-written, touched my heart, and had me nodding in agreement.

As a thoroughly modern bubbe, I cave in under the sparkling eyes of my six granddaughters (can anyone be so lucky?) as they study the catalogue from American Girls.

Some years ago, I called American Girl to say that a Jewish doll would be greatly appreciated and marketable; I set forth a suggestion similar to the Rochel doll you describe. It was not company policy to take such suggestions, they said, but I could write them a letter with an outline. A phone call came as an answer. They have in-house writers only, and in-house planning only. My mother would have said, "So go fight City Hall."

Although these issues are not world-shaking, they certainly could enrich and shake the worlds of our wonderful daughters and grand-girls. Thank you, Naomi and Susannah.

Marjorie Schonhaut Hirshan
Boynton Beach, Florida

I read with interest "Dolls to Live By." Several years ago, as director of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, I wrote to The Pleasant Company, encouraging them to develop a Jewish doll, perhaps with some academic and sales assistance from our museum. The response was that such a project did not seem marketable enough, or words to that effect. I thought then, and think now, "are they kidding?"

David Altshuler
New York, NY

Lilith welcomes letters to the editor, articles, fiction, poetry and memoirs. We reserve the right to edit letters for syntax and length.

To the young women who were lamenting the non-existence of Jewish American Girl dolls, I was disappointed in your suggestions for new dolls and commentary on the existing characters. One girl said all of her blonde (read: Christian) friends got Kirstin, the Swedish girl. The other young woman suggested (historically interesting) dolls with dark hair and eyes. Sigh. Let me tell you my story. I look like I fell off of an Easter parade float. Peaches and cream, blonde hair, blue eyes, little upturned pointy nose-the whole *shiksa* shmorgasborg. I was adopted into an American Eastern European family and converted at birth. At three, I was sent to a Jewish preschool, where I was singled out for ridicule because I did not look like anyone else. My cousins were all dark-eyed, dark-haired and became my template for beauty. I thought in order to be beautiful, one must have dark hair and eyes, something I would never have.

Jewish feminist critics have attacked "Dharma and Greg" for portraying the Jewish character as a (socially acceptable) fine-featured Lady Godiva blonde instead of a zaftig frizzy-haired Queen Esther brunette. Personally, I was thrilled to my secret soul to see someone like me on TV—blonde, flaky and Jewish. We criticize those who stereotype and pigeonhole us, then turn around and do the same to ourselves. It's taken me 25 years to accept my looks—blonde hair and all—and reshape my definition of beauty to now include myself.

Lizz Zitron
Columbia, Missouri

The Next Battle

Re: "Right-Wing Women: Keeping Orthodoxy Safe from Feminists?" (LILITH, Winter 1998) First things first: I consider myself both modern Orthodox and a feminist. I am currently embroiled in a set-to with the rabbi of my synagogue about my wearing my *tallit* to synagogue, and so very much have lived through the fear and prejudice and ignorance of the people who feel threatened by women who challenge rigid categories.

I took issue only with the little insert in the article entitled "What Do We Do With Adam's Rib?" In it, your writer attributes to Mina Glick a retranslation of the Hebrew *tsela* into "side." The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament lists "side" immediately after "rib" for its translation of the word. Moreover, the rabbis of the *midrash* expressed the view that the human was created as a two sided creature which was then "split" into its two components, male and female. The attribution of this view to a contemporary serves—certainly in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox—to undercut the credibility of the writer.

Which brings me to the next point: power lies in knowledge. The modern Orthodox woman must continue to insist on access to the same texts that were closed to us for too long. The next step, as your writer rightly pointed to at the end of the article, is to become the authors of new texts destined to accrue to the canon.

Susann Codish
via e-mail

By Tefillin Bound

Congratulations on the moving article by Haviva Ner-David ("Will She Be the First Orthodox Woman Rabbi?," LILITH, Winter 1999). Although I am a rabbi, I am not a graduate of the Conservative seminary. Both I and the woman who is my "*shul* partner" put on *tefillin* daily for the very same reason as Ner-David: in response to the Torah obligation to "bind them on our hands and put them for frontlets between our eyes." For a number of years there was a mailing list called the Women's Tefillin Network, both run by and subscribed to by many, many women who have accepted this *mitzvah*. I hope that the author of this article finds it heartening to know that many more than 20 women (as cited in the article) who are not Conservative rabbis wear *tefillin*.

Rabbi Arlene M. Schuster
Bellevue, Washington

Proud Crones

I loved the Winter 1999 issue of the magazine. I am using it in our "crone group." We are about ten to fifteen "older" women who meet once a month and exchange stories. I am collecting them, perhaps for publication some day.

Each meeting we pick a word and everyone writes for

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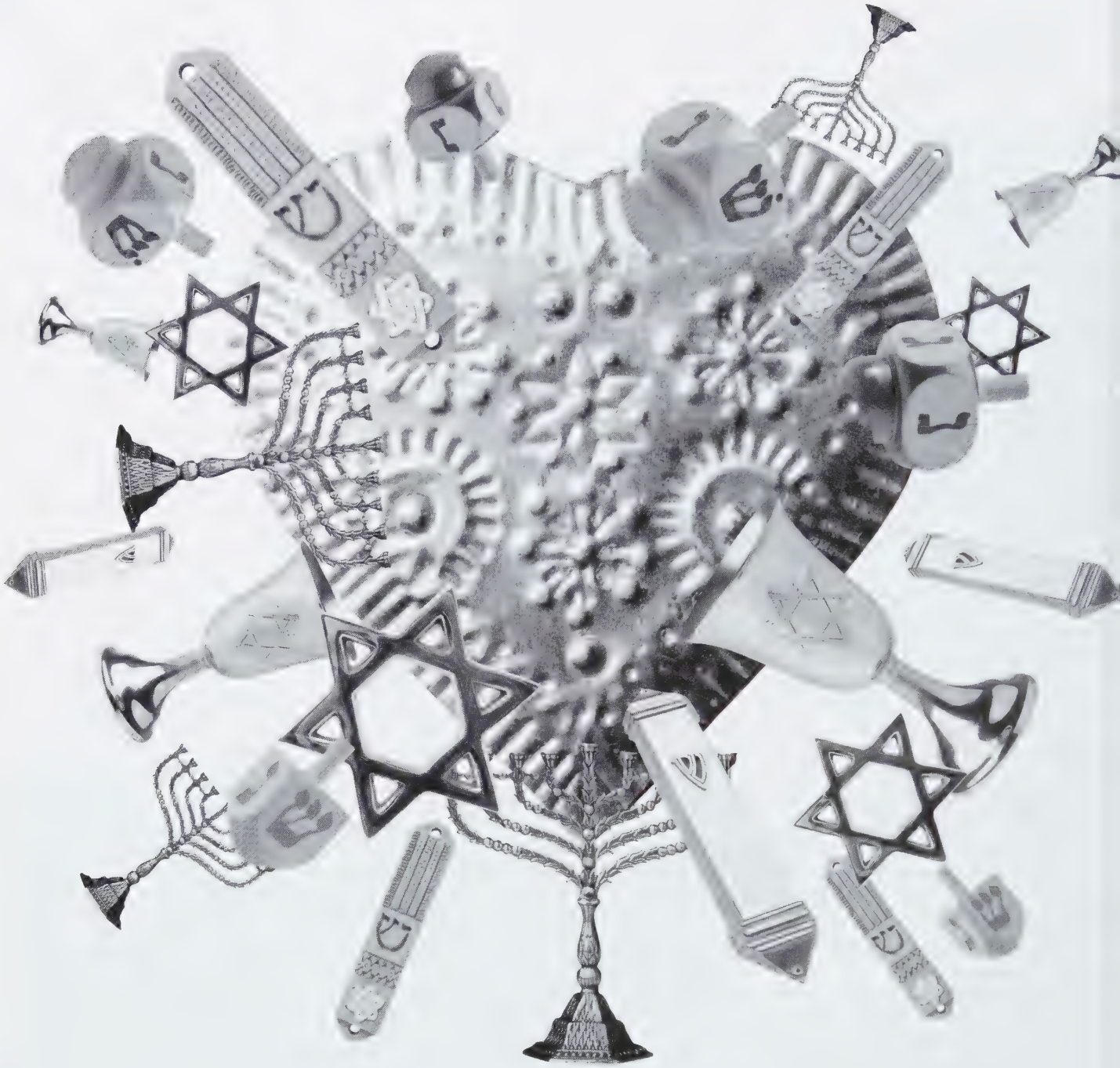


A Convert's Passion for Judaism

by Kathleen Peratis

At the Shabbat service in which my conversion to Judaism was celebrated nearly ten years ago, my husband and my four children and I did not sit together but were scattered throughout the sanctuary. This was not planned; neither was it an accident. My conversion caused conflict and divisions among us: my Jewish husband who was not interested in religion, any religion; my two non-Jewish (from a former marriage) children; and our two younger children. I had all alone fallen in love with Judaism. It would have been less disruptive if I had fallen in love with another man.

My decision to convert had been ripening for a long time. Once it occurred, it seemed organic, not radical. Recently, when someone suggested that I took on a "new identity" when I converted, I bristled. No I didn't. I am the same. I just found the religion, the tribal garb, the community that helps me make more sense of the world.

I was born into a family that was nominally Greek Orthodox (and I delight in telling people that I have an Orthodox background), but hardly religious. We went to church only for family occasions and for Easter (not Christmas, which was viewed as a secular American holiday).

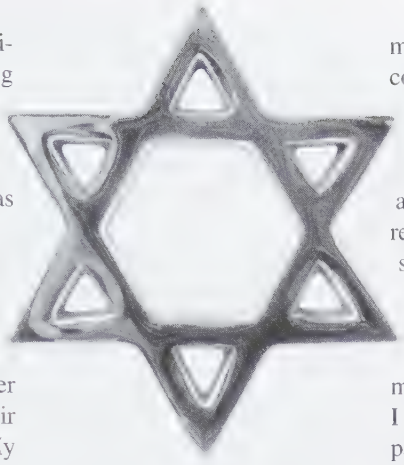
In this respect, as well as others, I was an oddball in my family. I did care about religion but I found the Christian myth distancing and I was never drawn in. I was drawn to Jews and to their cultural language from a very early age. My best friend was one of the few Jews in my town, I taught myself the Hebrew words to songs from Jan Peerce and Connie Francis records, I considered rushing the Jewish sorority in college, and I pretended to be Jewish after I moved to New York. Why? I don't know. Nevertheless, converting to Judaism also did not then occur to me. Perhaps it is because I didn't think of Jews as a religious community but as an ethnic one, and you can't join an ethnic community…can you?

In my re-entry into religious engagement in my late 20s, I had fascinating, exciting conversations with a smart, liberation theology-oriented former Roman Catholic priest, whom I then married. After three years and two children (Dimitri and Katherine), we separated and divorced and shortly thereafter, I married my real husband, a Jew who is Jewish through and through but not one tiny bit interested in Judaism. We agreed that our children would be "raised as Jews," although we never talked about what that might mean. We certainly never talked about my converting, nor about whether our children would convert. By the time we had been married two and a half years, we had two children. Sam was ritually circumcised on the dining room table and we had a baby-naming for Julia.

From the very beginning, I wanted to "celebrate" (or in some way acknowledge the existence of) Jewish holidays. All I knew about were the Big Three, so that is what we did. Initially I had little notion about how to organize a seder. I also didn't know what to do at home for Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. I set about learning. I no longer thought I was telling a big fat lie when I said I was Jewish. I began to consider converting but it was not on my active agenda; I would think about it, I told myself, after my parents were gone.

And then came the turning point.

I came home from a three-day conference I had attended with a friend and announced to my husband of ten years that I was going to convert. What had happened? At the conference, in an "identity" game, we were asked to stand under the sign that best represented us: Protestant, Catholic, Liberal, Activist, and so on. I was overcome with regret that I was not entitled to stand under the sign that said "Jew." That's where I felt I belonged, but I also felt that to have stood there would have been dishonest. I had to choose a sign that did not reflect my primary identification. It was at that moment that I realized it was time to make it official, my parents' good health notwithstanding, my husband's shock and dismay and lack of enthusiasm notwithstanding, my children's confusion notwithstanding. I signed up for lessons. Little did I know that I was about to fall totally and hopelessly in love with Judaism.



For my born-Jewish husband, it would have been less disruptive if I had fallen in love with another man.

I studied for a year before I converted (I am still studying), and during that time, I became increasingly interested and then totally absorbed. I could not talk about, think about, read or worry about anything else. I was often breathless with excitement about what I was learning, especially Torah and history. I saw a connection to what I was learning in everything. I pointed out the connection at every opportunity. I thought that everything I was learning was known by every Jew, and I thought I would never catch up. I made my friends crazy, and even lost a few who thought I was "too Jewish" (music!). When a friend told me around the time of my conversion that I (like all Jewish souls from the beginning of time) had been at Sinai, I was moved to tears. (I have since learned how commonplace is such praise of converts. Nevertheless, each of us believes that it is true.) Don't even *ask* about my first trip to Israel.

"Conversion week" was full of surprises. The moment of immersion in the *mikvah* was not transcendent—too much like baptism. But the Beit Din, the three-rabbi Jewish "court" that questioned me then and there to ensure that I was ready to take on the "yoke of the Torah," was exhilarating. I had studied for it as if it were Ph.D. orals. It turned out to be a very snappy, very Jewish conversation for which I was more than prepared. The rabbis were famous and smart. I felt so cool. I felt like I was home.

Then there was the Torah service on the next Shabbat. I had an *aliyah*, of course, and I also chanted part of the *haftarah* and the blessings before and after the *haftarah*. But the moment of greatest bliss for me was carrying the Torah around the sanctuary, seeing a sea of joyous faces advance, surround and

then part before the Torah and me. (To this day, carrying the Torah is an honor I prize much more highly than an *aliyah*.) At the party afterward, my husband had the best line of the day: He noted tartly that my conversion was his mother's revenge.

Then came the inevitable necessity of telling my parents. I actually didn't tell them—my children inadvertently exposed me when they referred, in a phone call with them about a month later, to "when Mom converted." I *was* going to tell them, but hadn't yet gotten around to it. My mother was shocked and immediately assumed that this meant that I was not Greek anymore, and she prepared, I am sure, to do the Greek Orthodox equivalent of sitting *shiva*. I explained to them that I was and would always remain Greek, and that being Jewish had no effect upon that. I told them that my being Jewish just meant (for present purposes) that I didn't believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. My mother replied, "Well, neither do I." My mother never exactly said so, but I knew what bothered her was that now I was "A Jew"; now I was different, a little alien from her (how could a Jew be her daughter?), and a member of that group about which ugly things are said. She is still not entirely comfortable with it, but the dust has settled.

The conversion itself turned out to be just the beginning. I continued studying, and learning Torah has been the most transformative experience of my life. I have spent my life as a public interest lawyer, and perhaps that was a useful precondition for being a real Jew, but it is in Torah that I found my Jewish soul, this Book which has kept the Jewish people together for thousands of years. Every word, every letter, every punctuation mark, has been analyzed, pored over, caressed, and has yielded its meaning, for thousands of years. Every generation sees it through its own lens, but nothing is lost. The dialogue across the ages is sublime.

Learning Jewish text, feeling a part of the sweep of Jewish history, being connected to this mad enterprise that demands, in the same tone of voice, the pursuit of justice and the saying of a prayer for going to the bathroom, has re-ordered my life. It's not that I have "found God." In fact, I have much less of an idea of God or of whether I believe in Her than I did ten years ago. But I know that there is holiness. I feel it when I learn a new insight that leaves me breathless. I feel it when I, hardly a New Age type, open my mouth and sing the word "*Ya*" and I experience one of those rare moments when I am totally and unselfconsciously present.

I know that sometimes I go too far. I can't analyze any problem that arises in my life or anyone else's without finding a parallel in the life of Jacob or Tamar or Esther. I delight in throwing around the Jewish organizational alphabet soup: JCPA, UAHC, NIF, ZOA. I can't take a shower without humming a *niggun*. Most of my friends are tolerant. Some of them, born Jews, have rediscovered Judaism in the wake of my mad passion.

The friends who found my obsession too much to take could at least go home at night. My family couldn't escape. I introduced increased practice into our family routines, and expected everyone to love it as much as I did. After all, we were all Jewish, weren't we? (My younger children, then seven and nine were converted, willingly, shortly after I was. As for the two non-Jewish kids, I just ignored the fact that this was not their tradition.) No more mere one- hour "family service" on the *haggim* (the major holidays). No, it was the whole day, or two days, and *erevs* as well. No more celebrating only the Big Three. There were many other festivals and fast days to observe and celebrate; and *shul* on Shabbat; and no *chazzer* in the house, not even egg rolls or pepperoni pizza. There were *mezzuzot* on every doorpost, and—this was big—there was no Christmas tree.

Not everything was a battle, but almost everything was an issue. I turned my husband, a man who had been indifferent to Judaism, into one who was often positively hostile to it. All of the children, but especially the younger ones, heard too much strife over Jewish issues. Some early issues were predictable, like whether we'd have a Christmas tree; others, less so, like whether we would light candles on Friday night if our guests were not Jewish. Later, my desire to stay in the city and go to *shul* on Friday night, and the children's desire to stay in the city on any pretext at all, left my husband isolated in his desire to continue the longstanding family practice of going to the country every weekend. My older daughter, Kate, with whom I had a very difficult relationship under the best of circumstances, felt, I think, even more distanced from me because of my new passion for something alien to her. Dimitri's equally unfortunate reaction was to seek to please me by bringing home Jewish girlfriends whether he liked them or not. And all of them knew that they could get to me by putting down things Jewish.

But there was good stuff too—deepened understanding, spiritual enrichment, and fun: The children's bar and bat mitzvahs were moments of transcendence for all of us, even their Christian grandparents. None of us

And others say...

When one member of a family embraces Judaism—either through conversion or a simple return to observance—she may be surprised to find her loved ones resistant, even resentful. Two recent books follow these difficulties with humor and sensitivity. In *The Year Mom Got Religion: One Woman's Midlife Journey into Judaism* (Jewish Lights), Lee Meyerhoff Hendler writes, "Unshared transformation requires patience, a thick skin, a sense of humor, a good memory, love and empathy." Though Hendler's take is humorous, one imagines her pain on "The Mother's Day from Hell," when her husband responded to her new kosher observance by taking the family out for a crab dinner.

Liberal baby-boomer Roberta Israeloff goes through a similar transition in *Kindling the Flame: A Woman's Spiritual Journey* (Simon and Schuster), recalling the fits and starts that take us from her sons' whining "Do we have to?" [go to synagogue] to her eldest son's bar mitzvah reflection: "That was the best bar mitzvah I've ever been to." —*SB*

us will forget seeing their Greek Orthodox grandmother sitting patiently with a transliteration and helping them practice their *haftarot*. And we have become for our friends the address for the Let's Eat portion of most Jewish holidays. Our many trips to Israel, in various combinations, have been extraordinary and have contributed to the strength of Sam's and Julie's Jewish identities—and Kate's as well. On a trip a few months ago, she told a young Ethiopian man she met at a bar on Yoel Solomon Street who suspected her pedigree that yes, indeed, she really was Jewish.

What accounted for the fact that the unmixing of this mixed marriage was a mixed blessing? Much of it was my fault. First of all, I was insecure and very defensive in my Jewishness. I had (had?!) an authenticity complex. I saw rejection by other Jews around every corner, and my feelings were hurt even when no criticism was intended at all. At a dinner party several years ago, the host commented that all the men were Jewish and none of the women were. I waved my hand and said, "Excuse me?" He said, "Well, you are not a real Jew" and my eyes welled up. Such incidents served only to deepen my insecurity and ensure that I would continue to try too hard—relentless study, passionate *davvening*, self-consciously peppering my discourse with Hebrew and Yiddish. A friend who was often in Israel with me pointed out that a dream I described to her was one that I had every year in Israel for several years running—that doors were being closed in my face. I avoid telling people that I am a convert. I pretend to know nothing about Christianity.

I had (had?!) an authenticity complex.

I was also grossly insensitive to my family's feelings. It never occurred to me that I couldn't fall in love and bring the new lover into the home and expect everyone else to fall in love too. When you are in love, you are a little crazy. I didn't see that I couldn't expect everyone to follow me off this cliff.

And my husband felt spurned. He felt jealous that my passion was not for him alone, and cheated that I had discovered riches in his tradition that had never been revealed to him. And angry that I, whom he continually described as a *shiksa* from California, was "out Jewing" him, a strongly identified Jew; that it was I to whom our friends addressed their questions about Jewish ritual, practice and history.

And now, ten years later? Things have gotten better, much better. For one thing, the sheer passage of time has made a difference, has given each of us a chance to get used to a new status quo. We've all grown up a little too. Dimitri has gotten over his need to pick girls who will make mom kvell. Katherine, philosopher, has decided that religion needn't divide us but can be a medium of connection—we now have long conversations and e-mail exchanges on the Jewish perspective on questions of philosophy and religion that interest her. Sam and Julie are committed Jews, and Zionists to boot. My husband credits me with the fact that our children have strong Jewish identities of which he is most proud—especially since the Jewishness of the children of many of our friends is in serious remission. Finally, that perennial favorite, the Christmas tree issue, doesn't come up anymore because we now just go away together for the Winter break. For the most part, we have stopped using Judaism as a battleground on which to wage other contests, and it is more likely to be used in good-natured teasing. Recently, when we were talking about our future retirement and I told my husband that I (unlike he) don't want to move to Connecticut "because," I said, "I am a New York Jew," he good-naturedly replied, "If you were really a New York Jew, you'd want to move to Connecticut." He tells people that it was my conversion that made our marriage mixed. He also knows what is out of bounds. He never calls me a *shiksa*.

The other thing that has changed is me. I realized that I could not continue headlong in the direction and at the pace I was going with a family that didn't want to go there. In addition, as time goes by, I feel more authentically Jewish, so I have less need to prove it. I have become more comfortable with the necessity to flatten my Jewish trajectory—I will not become a rabbi, keep kosher or make *aliyah*. That in turn has promoted another Jewish value, *shalom bayit*, peace in the home. I have learned that a Jewish home in which peace prevails is more Jewish than one filled with acrimony and four sets of dishes. ■

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What Converts Talk About (When Jews Aren't Around)

by Angela Himsel

Jewish history hinges upon a particular female convert named Ruth. To her mother-in-law, Naomi, a Bethlehemite, Ruth spoke the immortal words, "Whither thou goest, I will go…thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God." I, as well as other converts to Judaism, have discovered what Ruth wisely understood 4,000 years ago: It's a package deal. It's a religion, but also a land and a people.

I converted ten years ago. Though born and raised in a quite religious Christian family, I had never understood how one God could be broken down into God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Beyond the mathematical puzzle, I balked at the notion that somebody else could pay the price for my sins, and that only in accepting this dead deity as my savior could I get to heaven.

At the age of 19, my spiritual search took me to Israel, and by 22, in New York, I had met a fellow who turned out to be a serial *shiksa*-dater and got it into his head that he, his family and the entire Jewish community would be happier if I were Jewish. But I still wasn't ready to make the big leap of faith.

Then, quite unexpectedly, I got pregnant. Who knows, God may have "given me conception," as He did with Ruth. He undoubtedly knew that, left to my own devices, I would glide along, uncommitted, for a long time. Eleven years ago, six months pregnant and single, I decided to start the conversion process with an Orthodox rabbi. My future husband's family was Orthodox and I didn't want there ever to be any doubts about my children's legitimacy as Jews.

When I met with the rabbi for the first time, he asked me general questions about Judaism, quizzed me about holidays and blessings and rituals. What he did not talk about, to my puzzlement, was redemption, the meaning of life, or Jesus. He never asked me about my faith or lack of faith, or if I was sure I was ready to give up Christianity and Jesus. It was almost as if Jesus were an ex-husband, an embarrassing relative we'd rather not discuss in polite company.

We whisper about how we could be so happy with a piece of bacon right now.

Perhaps that's why, across a crowded *bris*, when my eyes meet those of another convert, within moments, we are whispering not about our first tentative taste of chopped liver but about how we could be so happy with a piece of bacon right about now, and how about that Christmas tree?

Last year, the week after Rosh Hashana, I met two friends, Julie and Lisa—fellow converts—for lunch at a cozy diner on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Lisa, a fair-haired, soft-spoken woman in her 20s, had converted two years before with an Orthodox rabbi. Julie, dark-haired and vivacious with a quick laugh, had within the year completed a Reform conversion.

Lisa launched almost immediately into her experience celebrating Rosh Hashana for the first time as a Jew: "The first day, David and I get to *shul* early, like always. Right away, the women start gossiping, about who's sick, who grew up in Brooklyn with them, who's renovating their bathroom, and I can't concentrate—not that I can understand Hebrew…" I had forgotten that some people actually went to synagogue expecting uninterrupted and meaningful prayer time. Clearly, Lisa had not been Jewish as long as I had.

"So the second day," Lisa continued, "I figured I would come late for *shul*. Afterward, David said that, you know when they're bringing the Torah around and you're supposed to kiss it? Well, the rabbi stopped in David's row and whispered, 'Where's Lisa?' Can you believe the rabbi stopped the service to ask, 'Where's the convert?' The other Jewish wives can sleep in late and the rabbi doesn't notice because they're Jewish and they'll always be Jewish, but me, I'm late and who knows—maybe I've slipped?"

Julie jumped in, "None of the Jews I know

went to temple for Rosh Hashana. Do you know what Seth did for Rosh Hashana? He took his kids out for lobster. Lobster! Seth's ex-wife says, 'Julie's not Jewish.' His ex doesn't go to temple, but I'm the convert and I should go?" Julie readily admitted that she converted less from conviction than from a desire to marry her husband. "I often think God put Seth in front of me as a test, and I chose Seth over Jesus," she said.

We bounced from gefilte fish ("I hate it!" Julie said. "When I see the gefilte coming, my coat's on.") to excessive bar mitzvahs to an appreciation for the emphasis on family within Judaism, finally alighting on the other favorite topic of discussion among converts: Jesus.

"What do you think of Jesus now?" I asked.

"I think there's a convert purgatory," Julie said. "God says you were for Jesus once but now you're Jewish, so..." In other words, you get credit for once being Christian but you don't make it all the way to heaven because you betrayed Jesus.

"I can just see," Julie went on, "Jesus is up there in heaven and He's saying, 'Thanks a lot, Julie, you Judas Iscariot....' I told my husband I feel like Judas Iscariot and he said, 'Who?'"

"It's in the afterlife that it all comes into play," Lisa responded, so quietly that I had to ask her to repeat it. "It's then that your soul is judged."

"And Jews don't really believe in an afterlife," Julie added.

"Well, they do," I argued, "but most of them don't know they're allowed to. *Olam ha-ba*, the world to come, is a part of Jewish theology, but I think they don't stress it much because they don't want us to worry about the next life and ignore what we need to do in this life." Though I defended Judaism, I understood this struggle, possibly specific to former Christians, to understand, "What next? Will I make it? What's God's plan? How about the Messiah and redemption? Redeeming the world is great, but what about me?"

I've always been puzzled as to why most brands of Judaism shy away from the Messiah. Is it not intellectual enough? Too *hasidic*? Too Christian? I was secretly disappointed that Judaism promoted no plan for the afterlife. In not addressing these issues, whether because the afterlife is not considered as crucial as learning the proper blessing to say over a snack, then by default, Judaism has ceded to other religions the opportunity to define the Big Picture and our own little individual part in it.

We chat about excessive bar mitzvahs and the admirable emphasis on family, finally alighting on another favorite topic among converts: JESUS.

I asked Julie and Lisa if they felt Jewish. Julie gave a flat "No." Although Lisa does feel Jewish, she feels she'll never really be accepted. "I'll always be a *gera*." A convert.

Ruth was known as Ruth the Moabitess (i.e., not an Israelite) until she married Boaz. After that, she was plain old Ruth. Though 3,000 years may separate us, like Ruth, I do feel like one of the family now, with no appellation. This spring on Shavuot, I will sit in the synagogue with the rest of the House of Israel and listen to the Ten Commandments and the book of Ruth being read. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, when the entire Jewish people accepted the Law.

According to the book, Ruth heard no voice calling her, as Abraham did, to leave her land and people. If she heard a call from God, it was a personal, silent, hidden call, meant for her alone. On Shavuot, in linking the Book of Ruth with the Ten Commandments, we understand that the universal God at Mt. Sinai and the individual God in the book of Ruth are one and the same. So I will not feel myself a *gera*, a convert, among strangers.

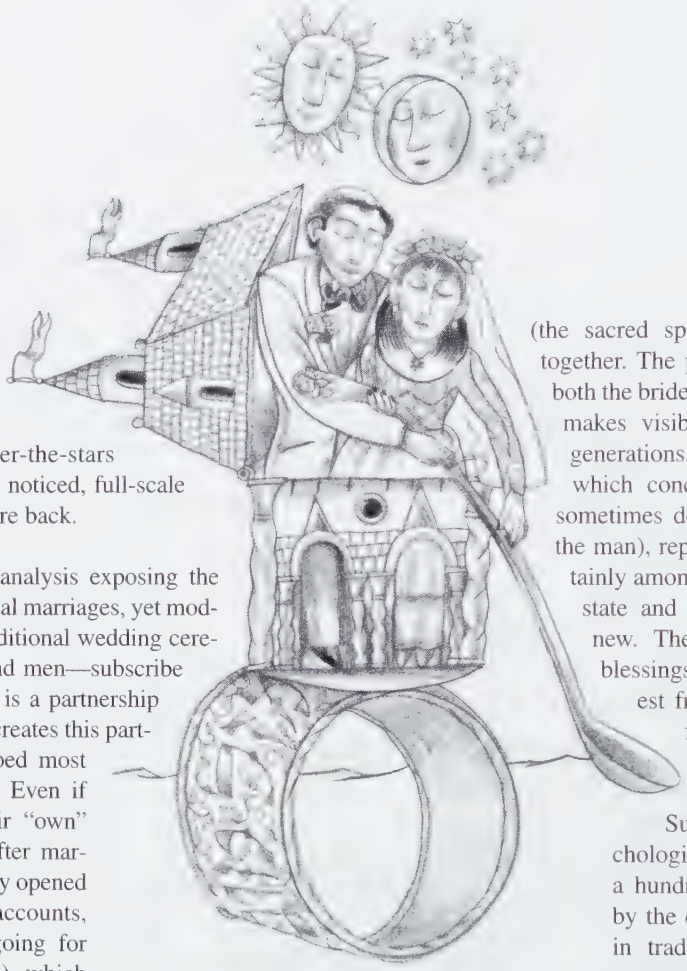
And I will find there, too, connections to the redemptive vision on which I was raised. The book of Ruth opens with a reference to both spiritual as well as physical barrenness. It ends with a harvest and with the birth of Ruth's child, Obed, the grandfather of King David, the progenitor of the future Messiah. Physically and spiritually, the people and the land, the seed and the soil, were barren no longer. And through the seed and soul, through the generations of David, God offers the promise of redemption for the entire world.

I've not, like Ruth, adopted Israel as my physical homeland, but my seed, my children, have connected me more powerfully to Jews worldwide than I might have been otherwise. But ultimately, it's not a piece of land, or even my children, which link me invisibly to the Jewish people. Rather, it is a text that has been passed down from generation to generation. By however circuitous a route that text came to me, now I live, too, within that text, and I am one of the people of the Book. ■

Angela Himsel's writing has appeared in Tikkun, Partisan Review, BOMB and other magazines. She has recently completed a novel, and lives in New York City.

Isn't It Ironic...
Retro Weddings in a Feminist Age

by Susan Weidman Schneider



When was the last time you heard about an elopement, or a barefoot-among-the daisies, *huppah*-under-the-stars wedding? In case you hadn't noticed, full-scale ceremonial white weddings are back.

Isn't it ironic?

Thirty years of feminist analysis exposing the perils women face in traditional marriages, yet modern women are opting for traditional wedding ceremonies. Even as women—and men—subscribe to the premise that marriage is a partnership of equals, the ceremony that creates this partnership seems to have escaped most women's analytical scrutiny. Even if they are going to keep their "own" (i.e., their fathers') names after marriage, even if they have already opened his, hers and ours bank accounts, young Jewish women are going for *ketubot* (wedding contracts) which still talk about the groom's purchase of his bride, and rituals in which the groom checks under her veil to make sure he's getting what he paid for. Even staunch advocates of women's equality seem comfortable, at least for a few hours, enacting what appears to be a classic sexist drama—bride in virginal white, "given away" or handed off from her family of origin to her husband.

Why? Lilith decided it was time to find out.

In the following pages, you'll meet rabbis who both defend and challenge the customs of Jewish weddings, brides willing to accommodate to tradition even when this compromises their feminist beliefs, and at least one woman who says NO to a ceremony in which the man she loves *acquires* her.

The tricky part is that there are positive aspects of some of the wedding symbolism. The witnesses who must sign the *ketubah* are, in a way, the guardians or godparents of the marriage itself. The *huppah* or bridal canopy signifies the house (the sacred space) the couple will create together. The presence of parents escorting both the bride and the groom down the aisle makes visible the connections between generations. The breaking of the glass which concludes most weddings (now sometimes done by both the woman and the man), represents many things, but certainly among them is the ending of a past state and the beginning of something new. The traditional seven wedding blessings, often doled out to the closest friends and relatives to recite, focus on the joy the partners take in each other.

Lilith Editor-at-Large Susan Schnur, a rabbi and psychologist who has married more than a hundred couples, is not surprised by the current yearning to do things in traditional ways. "The couples want to know the rules. The wedding connects you to a larger whole."

This would explain the current popularity of the formal marriage proposal, even from a suitor who has already been living with his bride-to-be for years; elaborate ceremonies separate before and after. Even non-religious couples are selecting Orthodox options where they do not see each other for several days before the wedding, and the bride goes to the *mikvah* before the wedding. "People want it to feel holy and more real," Schnur says.

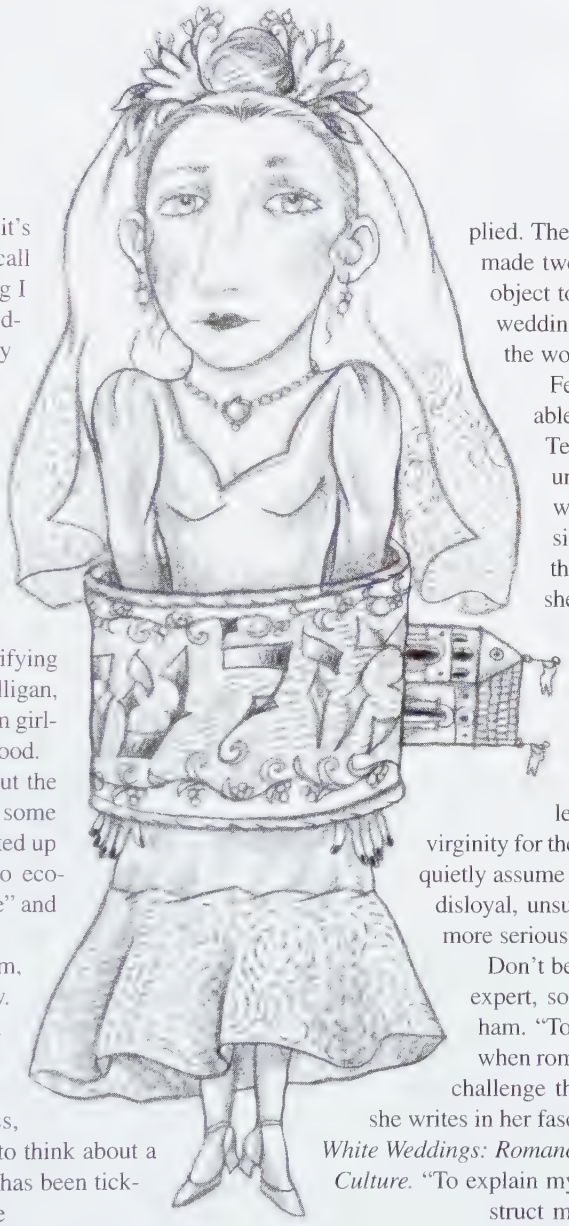
"The point of pageant at a time of change is that we want things to have a lot of rules; pageantry stabilizes things in a time of change," she continues. "At its core, marriage is hard. Why do we have these public things? We need lots of people to witness, to notarize, to be on our side." Especially for women and men who have lived through messy marriages and divorces in their own families, she observes, "They want to do this well." ■

ILLUSTRATIONS ON PAGES 16, 17, 20 AND 27 BY ILENE WINN-LEDERER

A Counterproposal

One Young Woman Resists On-Bended-Knee Conventions

by Sarah Blustain



Elaborate wedding rings like this were used in Europe in the 15th-18th centuries. Often the property of the Jewish community, they were loaned to the couple, to be replaced later by a gold band. The structure atop the ring signified their new home and the Temple.

About a year ago, my partner (it's so hard to figure out what to call him) of three years—knowing I would squirm at a grand gesture—timidly handed me a peach-flavored candy ring and suggested we might formalize our relationship.

"Me, a wife!?" I thought to myself. My associations with the word were fairly grim: It was one syllable away from "housewife," with whatever pejorative connotations that carries; there was "wife-beating," Henny Youngman's oft-repeated "Take my wife, please," and the vaguely terrifying "Stepford wife." In line with Carol Gilligan, my ego had barely survived the leap from girlhood into womanhood, let alone wife-hood.

It's a little embarrassing to admit, but the first thing I did was run to the OED for some background. Together Daniel and I looked up "wife." Most of the references were to economic roles like "alewife" and "fishwife" and I can't say I was much inspired.

I told Daniel I was committed to him, but as for the rest, I just didn't know. After sharing bills and vacations, and the grief over his mother's death, our relationship seemed pretty stable, with or without three rings. Nonetheless, Daniel suggested I take the next week to think about a public ceremony. Since then, the clock has been ticking, and Daniel has been announcing me as his committed one, which has the added meaning (a bonus!) of referring to me as an inmate of an institution for the mentally unsound.

As that week has drawn out into many, my initial objection has multiplied. The process of sorting it all out has made two things clear: Just how much I object to participating in my own white wedding; and just how much the rest of the world insists upon it.

Few people I know are comfortable challenging the wedding trope. Tell a married couple you're uncomfortable with the notion of a wedding and there's this eerie silence, as if you are mocking them. Tell it to a single person and she becomes cranky that you are failing to appreciate your loving partner. Girlfriends flinch when I say I'd hate a diamond ("But you've got it coming to you!") and shrug when I say I can't possibly sign a Jewish legal wedding contract selling my virginity for the price of 200 zuzim. All of them quietly assume that I am afraid of commitment, disloyal, unsure about the fellow, or perhaps more seriously psychologically disturbed.

Don't believe me? Take the words of an expert, sociology professor Chrys Ingraham. "To develop critical consciousness when romance is the prevailing form is to challenge the boundaries of acceptability," she writes in her fascinating new sociological study, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. "To explain my critique the reader could construct me as unfit for marriage, embittered by love lost, or just not a very happy person."

In other words, if you're going to resist the formal wedding tradition, prepare for the pathologizing response, and a shrink-wrapped Rx.

But I'm *not* scared, and I *don't* feel crazy. Most days, I feel frustrated that what seems so intuitive to me—that a traditional wedding makes no sense in the feminist world—should be so hard to communicate. Many days I feel lonely because, as patient as Daniel has been, I'm figuring this out in a generally hostile world. Often I feel confused, knowing how much easier it would be on my relationship, and on my spirits, to walk down the aisle. But how much harder it would be on my soul! And once, recently, I felt grateful for the visit from a couple, dear friends, who were unified in their rejection of official oversight of their loyal and long-term relationship. Most days I know that to wed would change little because Daniel and I already do our best relationship work every day. And most days I also know that to wed would feel like I was being sentenced to the silence and passivity that marked women's pasts and indeed my own fairly typical middle-class girlhood as well.

Some say that the social pressures of a wedding—the public ceremony, the witnessed *ketubah*, the extraordinary expense—play an important role in turning the one-day ceremony into a life-long commitment. But if feminism has taught us anything, it is to acknowledge the social pressures that direct our lives, to become aware that our assumptions, our choices—indeed our very desires to dress up in white and play fairy princess—might be created by forces outside ourselves, forces we don't very much like. We happily question our fashions—are we really more comfortable in panty-hose and pumps?—our motherhood, our sexuality. So why, when I ask people to apply that same soul-searching questioning to the white wedding, do I become the iconoclast I'm not trying to be?

> Feminism taught us to question high heels, so why don't more of us rethink the white wedding?

On one of the many web sites that pop up when I search for "Jewish weddings," I recently found "A Word about Wedding Gowns—Especially for Grooms." The priceless advice read, in part, "There's something you should be aware of, especially all you grooms out there. A WOMAN HAS PICTURED WHAT SHE WOULD LOOK ON HER WEDDING DAY FROM THE TIME SHE WAS A LITTLE GIRL.—THIS IS NOT THE AREA TO CUT BACK ON EXPENSES." The words were written in all caps and in bold. The message, I assume, is important.

If I pictured myself in a wedding gown when I was a little girl—a fact I highly doubt—I can honestly say it's been decades since that vision has visited itself upon me. That's not to say that throughout my teens and 20s I didn't imagine a man who would become my companion, my champion, who would embrace and accept me. But it had little to do with walking down the aisle. Indeed, the older I've gotten—and the more imminent the wedding decision—the clearer it has become that a wedding, with all its adherence to an outdated model of gender relations, is itself the biggest stumbling block to my marriage. The trappings of the wedding simply do not represent what I aspire to in my life, or in this intimate, chosen relationship. As I imagine it, marriage is a process—a figuring out day in and day out how to walk side by side—and I've been engaged in that process with Daniel for several years now. The public imprimatur on my worthiness changes me not a whit.

In her book, *My Life as a Boy,* Kim Chernin imagines herself as a woman exploring her own boyhood. Courting a woman, holding the door and kissing her hand, the boy/woman/Chernin begins to notice change. "A sense of privilege began to inhabit my whole body, which no longer set out into the world in apology for itself, shoulders stooped, breasts submerged....My body had acquired arrogance, a pride of limb, an inclination toward self assertion."

As an adult, I have always yearned for this feeling, imagined that I, proposing on bended knee, would embody the energy of the adventuring boy. Then, I thought, I would really know, the way you know when you've spent months looking for the right job, or days searching for the right gift, that it's just the thing you want. Then, I thought, I would not say yes, high-school style, simply because someone asked. If I did the proposing, I thought, then I would be the Actor, and not the poor wench in the spotlight as the rest of the cast holds its breath, "yes" or "no." But Daniel jumped my gun, and the truth is now that he's asked, I can't. As for The Ring, forget about it.

I'm haunted even today by those high school years when this whole long process of mating began—with our initial attempts simply to *speak* to the opposite sex. As boys crept onto our radar screens, all we could do was hope that we were creeping onto theirs. In a girl, wanting was bad. Waiting was good. When word of my first crush got out (was I 12 years old?), I blushed to my very core. With teasing words ringing in my ears, I learned that my desire (albeit laughingly modest at the time) was embarrassing, shameful, and probably wrong.

On the other hand, when, some years later, another boy I desperately liked asked whether I wanted to go to the prom, with my heart breaking I said "no." My response was visceral, not theoretical. Already, then, I didn't like the chivalry. Nor did I relish the eternal shopping and primping—a rehearsal dinner?—for the benefit of my "date." More than a decade later, feminism would help me clarify what I might have wanted then: to have invited my crush to my prom myself? Or perhaps to have invited him to conspire somehow in my rebellion? But then I didn't know there might be another way.

Today, I'm still trying to find that other way. Daniel's proposal notwithstanding, I made a decent attempt at regaining my Agency. Daniel had been eager to settle this thing called our relationship, and the truth is the effort of staving off a wedding was wearing on us as a couple, and on my peace of mind. So, on my 30th birthday, I surprised Daniel and the 30 dearest gathered together with a speech I'd prepared in advance. It took about 10 minutes (and a glass of wine gulped beforehand), and I suppose amounted to a counterproposal. I was funny and charming and in control. My audience was

rapt. Daniel, in shock, was bashful and shy.

"Suddenly it began to dawn on me that making a commitment just might be an essential, deep and altogether mysterious necessity," I told the group, my wine glass raised, Daniel unmoving at my elbow. And while I successfully avoided the words "marriage" and "engaged" and "husband" and "wedding," I did announce my commitment in front of the most important witnesses in my life.

Though I was sorry to take Daniel by surprise, I was not sorry when he ended up speechless. I'd seen this scene, gender-reversed, a million times before, in movies, on TV soap operas and junky talk shows. I had heard a close friend tell me that she was waiting for her boyfriend of 10 years to propose. He would feel deprived if he didn't have the chance to ask. Deprived, I thought but did not say, of the chance to prove his manhood. And here, I had proven mine. It was not a game. It was perhaps the bravest thing I've done.

Still and all, with the proposal done to my satisfaction comes the difficulty of actually holding a wedding. I'm still stalling. The feminist objections are manifold, responding to a whole body of thinking that holds that silent beauty is a woman's natural role. In a wedding, everything happens *to* the bride, while she herself does little. She is given away, she is unveiled, she is kissed, and—in the Jewish tradition—she is acquired. [Need to know more? See Heidi Gralla, page 20]. And then, of course, she is deflowered. It hearkens back to the days when all brides were blushing for a reason.

In an optimistic mood, I told Daniel that I would have a wedding if I could wear crimson. Crimson gets around the false virginity and, frankly, asserts itself. You can't do *to* crimson, I thought to myself vaguely, just what you can do to white. He said, "How about a white dress with a crimson sash." I told my hipster friend the same thing. She said, "How about white with a crimson sash." I continue to dream in crimson.

So why is it that when you speak to a woman about her wedding day, she is so totally enthusiastic? Even vocal feminists eye weddings with appreciation. They've rejected so many forms of the old gender roles, but when it comes to this one, where the woman appears to be in the starring role, they buckle. If you ask secular Jewish women who had traditional weddings why they did so, nine times out of ten they will mention tradition: I wanted to feel connected to my grandmother and great-grandmother and so on. (Women rarely mention connecting with their mothers' weddings: It happened too recently, and they've had to live with the often mixed results. Few fairy tales there.)

And sure enough, standing under that *huppah*, backs turned to the audience, wearing the sprightly white of youthful virginity, circling her groom or receiving her ring, that bride has stepped through the looking glass into the past and become a distant image called BRIDE. Forget about connecting to her grandmother. She could very well *be* her grandmother.

I ask the question, Why would you want to be that grandmother? Do you imagine that she went gaily up that aisle? Do you imagine hers was a marriage of love and not of arrangement? Don't you know that, at the very least, she acquiesced to the formulaic "acquisition" of a Jewish marriage? For at least one of my two grandmothers (and many other women like her), the walk down the aisle was an act not freely chosen. And to a certain extent her entirely familiar white wedding accurately prefigured her relationship. (Minus, of course, the glamour.)

The weddings we hold today, as in yesteryear, are not dramatic productions with the bride in the starring role. They are real life, significant large-scale public events that should reflect our values. And if we've rejected those old gender roles, we ought to reject their most celebrated moment—the prototypical faceless figures on the cake—as well. For me, the idea of stepping into those white slippers walks not only us but our foremothers into never-never land. And if we're ever going to clarify the distorted picture of women that history offers us, that's not a step we ought to take.

Truth is, no one I talk to wants to deconstruct the fairy tale. They just want to know "When's the date?" I'm tired of walking this one alone (albeit with Daniel's patient step beside me), worn down with worry, unable to gird myself against the shrugs and raised eyebrows. Contrary to public opinion, this search for resolution is no small effort I have undertaken, no symbolic defiance. Just when I think I've found a feminist *ketubah* with roots in actual Jewish tradition, I find out it will not be accepted by Jewish law, and I'm angry again. Just when I've taken comfort in the simplicity—for the sake of my relationship and my own throbbing head—of just taking the plunge, I am unwilling again to be compliant in the compromise. For even as feminism has forced change into Judaism, it has not silenced the echoes of the deepest patriarchal tradition. A wedding by it's very nature compromises my feminism.

So I have gotten only as far as the "proposal," which I offered up on my 30th birthday. Speaking to my friends and family, I said:

"To help me get through this, I will assign you all four important tasks:

"First, to serve as witnesses that I still have not said the dreaded "M" word.

"Second, to raise your glasses to my parents and sister, who have brought me to this point.

"Third, to join me in wishing that Daniel's mother Dorothy were here today.

"And finally, to raise your glasses to Daniel, to whom—or with whom (depending on how things go)—I hope to be committed."

How Elastic Is Jewish Tradition?

by Heidi Gralla

For centuries, Jewish brides and grooms have been married under a *huppah*, a symbol of the Jewish home. Traditionally, the groom placed a ring on the bride's finger and declared her "consecrated" to him. The bride said nothing. Nothing.

If the *huppah* was representative of the home, then what did the bride's silence say of what was expected of her in marriage?

"For me, the thought that only the groom initiates and only the bride receives is not reflective of a relationship," said Shira Milgrom, rabbi of Congregation Kol Ami, a reform synagogue in White Plains, New York. "For a wedding to be complete, both bride and groom need to initiate and receive, and both bride and groom need to speak."

Like many of her colleagues, Milgrom is committed to performing weddings that maintain Jewish tradition but make the bride an equal partner in the process. It's not an easy task considering that the basic premise of the traditional ceremony was that the groom *acquired* his bride. (No wonder she is silent!) The terms of his acquisition were laid out in the *ketubah*, the formal wedding contract, signed of course by *male* witnesses. So while many couples start out thinking they can create an egalitarian wedding simply by changing a few words or sharing the breaking of the glass, many rabbis will counsel them to dig much deeper.

Today, teachers at the Jewish seminaries said they devote substantial class time to discussing egalitarian weddings. They don't give rabbinical students very specific guidelines about what can and cannot be done in the name of equality. Instead, they encourage their students to examine the traditions and the meanings behind them, and from that formulate their own conclusions. "We look at even such seemingly innocuous things as who arrives at the *huppah* first, who speaks first or who breaks the glass," said Rabbi Nancy Wiener, instructor on pastoral counseling at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College, who has just written a book about Reform weddings entitled *Beyond Breaking the Glass*.

The Reform movement began addressing these issues as early as the 1850s, but changes in every stream of Judaism have come very slowly, and at times paradoxically. For instance, according to Conservative movement policy, a woman can be ordained as a rabbi and therefore can officiate at weddings, but she still has to find two men to sign as witnesses on the *ketubah*. Even in more liberal denominations, change may have been slowed by the knowledge that such weddings—and the offspring they produce—will not be considered legitimate by Orthodox authorities who wield power in Israel and around the world.

Many feminist-driven innovations have found their way into the Jewish wedding, but nothing seems to have sparked as much thought and debate as the ring ceremony. Traditionally, this ceremony was meant to symbolize the *kinyan*, or acquisition, of the bride. The groom would place the ring on the bride's finger and say *"Haray at mekudeshet li b'taba'at zu k'dat Moshe v'Yisrael,"* "By this ring you are consecrated to me in accordance with the traditions of Moses and Israel." Most non-Orthodox rabbis now routinely have the bride and groom exchange rings—a ritual that appears, to family and friends in the audience, to be wholly egalitarian. But there is little agreement among rabbis on whether the bride may say *"Haray atah...,"* consecrating the groom to her in return.

Some say this mutuality is a violation of *halacha*, or Jewish law. If the bride and groom make an even exchange of rings and vows, that cancels out the acquisition. Rabbi ►

Under the African Huppah

Aliyah Baruchin

Because ours is an interfaith, interracial, tri-cultural relationship, Donald and I wanted our wedding ceremony to reflect as many of our traditions as possible. Donald is West African, from Sierra Leone, raised Protestant; I'm an American Reform Jew, half Russian and half Greek. To cover both religious bases, at least, we decided on an interfaith ceremony to be jointly led by a rabbi and a minister, with no restrictions on religious content. We set out in search of a rabbi first.

Four months, 20 phone calls and three interviews later, we found ourselves empty-handed. It had been difficult enough to draw candidates from a list of those few rabbis even willing to entertain the notion of an interfaith ceremony; we then had to whittle that list down to eliminate everyone who insisted that the second cleric be only a minor officiant, or who refused to co-officiate at ceremonies with overt Christian content, or who adhered to any number of other restrictions by which we didn't want to be bound. Out of the now-tiny list of workable possibilities, we met with three rabbis, and at this point the search took on a Goldilocks quality. One rabbi was nice enough, and very progressive, but for me, something just didn't feel right. The second rabbi was actually unstable, as his chaotic conversation and junk-filled office shelves demonstrated. And the third had written a beautiful interfaith ceremony but seemed surprisingly self-absorbed, and was charging double the rate we'd heard elsewhere—more than we could possibly afford. All told, not the kind of Judaism I hoped to introduce into my new, shared life.

It was on the way home from that last meeting, on a clear summer night, that Donald broke our exasperated silence to ask, half-jokingly, "Well, why don't we do it ourselves?"

The minute I heard him say it, I felt my breath catch. Do it ourselves! Our own words, spoken in our own voices. Though I'd been to a self-led ceremony before, I admit that I hadn't really entertained the idea for us. Ours was already a homemade wedding—we were the caterers, the decorators, the printers—and I'd looked forward to having at least one responsibility taken off our shoulders. But the idea of reaching the *huppah* and having a chance to join hands, turn and actually address the people we love became irresistible.

There were plenty of hurdles to overcome. What would we have to do to make the ceremony legal? Who would sign our marriage license? How could we convince our relatives that we hadn't lost our minds? Ultimately, in what became one of my favorite pre-wedding moments, we wound up writing much of the ceremony at a corner table at Pete's Tavern, a lower-Manhattan watering hole. Donald had suggested that we call on friends and family to help us lead certain portions of the ceremony, so we doled out blessings and readings and everything else—right down to the leading of vows, which went to Donald's brother and my sister, and the final benediction, which would be led in Hebrew and English by both our fathers.

However thrilled we were with the way the ceremony looked on paper, nothing prepared us for the impact of it live. At the United Nations International School in Manhattan, we gathered under a *huppah* made of an African fabric in deep red, orange, black and gold, a pattern called "Good Husband." Our wedding party had shawls, cummerbunds and bowties made of the same fabric, in a Sierra Leonean custom called "ashiobie," in which members of a group or family dress alike as a show of solidarity. Though I wore an ivory gown, my flowers were wrapped in the material, and each guest was given a scarf made of the fabric, so that the ashiobie could include everyone in the room. In Sierra Leone, marriage is the union not only of two people, but of two families, and our ceremony introduced our families—and our families' traditions—to one another. A friend chanted kiddush; Donald's mother delivered a homily; his aunt offered libations at a nearby doorway, pouring rum and asking the family's ancestors for blessing; Donald and I each broke a glass. It was 25 minutes filled with laughter and music and microphone feedback, and, as we assured the assembled, it was all legal: We'd had our license signed a few hours earlier, with my sister and Donald's brother as witnesses. And though we'd exchanged vows at that signing, in the end, neither of us felt entirely married until we'd done it again, before the people we love. *We wanted our promises to one another to be made in your sight*, we told them, in our own words, our own voices. For us, that meant everything. ■

Aliyah Baruchin is a researcher at Vanity Fair and a freelance magazine writer.

William Lebeau, a vice-chancellor at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, believes that "there is still meaning to maintaining the traditional format." He argues that the bride is not silent in accepting the ring. "Her public receipt of the ring, and the symbol of their having made a mutual commitment is the proclamation she makes," he said. While he is not eager to have her say "*haray atah*," Lebeau encourages the bride to say some words of Jewish text accepting her husband's acquisition of her.

Such responsive statements certainly elevate the bride's role in the ceremony, but many Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis—and a few Conservative ones—argue that anything other than the *"haray atah"* is still a consolation prize for the bride. "The other things don't have force," said Conservative rabbi Carol Levithan, who helps teach a course for engaged couples at Manhattan's Jewish Community Center on the Upper West Side. "This is the language that traditionally made the marriage."

But it may be time to do away with the acquisition formula altogether. In her groundbreaking book *Engendering Judaism,* Rachel Adler, a professor of religion and social ethics at Hebrew Union College, points out that the acquisition of one human being by another is no longer considered morally acceptable. So if it's wrong for the groom to acquire the bride, this isn't really rectified by the bride's doing the same to the groom. Adler proposes an entirely new approach, in which couples are entering into a *brit ahuvim* or "lovers' covenant." The ring ceremony would be replaced by "a form of *kinyan* that was used in ancient times exclusively for partnership acquisition." In this form, partners pool symbols of their resources—personal items, possibly their wedding rings—in a bag, and then lift the bag together while reciting a blessing of their choice. (Adler suggests the blessing that is traditionally used upon seeing a rainbow: "Blessed are you...who remember your covenant and is faithful to your covenant and keeps your word.")

The acquisition of one human being by another is no longer considered morally acceptable.

But most non-Orthodox rabbis—and most engaged couples—still seem uneasy with radical innovations. "There's the power of a few words that come from a long time ago that makes the moment a sacred moment," said Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, rabbi at Congregation Beth El Zedeck, a Conservative and Reconstructionist synagogue in Indianapolis. "Sometimes I think there's an effort to add so much that we lose the power of the symbols: the Hebrew words or phrases that the emotions immediately respond to, that evoke that sense of history."

Another component of the wedding that has been adapted to embrace feminism is the *ketubah*. Traditional *ketubot* were simple documents that laid out the financial terms of the marriage, including a "purchase price" for the bride's virginity, but said nothing about love. Nowadays, many couples write their own, including personal facets of their relationship, such as things they like to do together, or a pledge to share all housework.

"To me, the ketubah—their sacred vows to each other which will hang on their wall and be looked at every day—should contain in their own words their most sacred commitments" as well as some specifics about their relationship, said Fred Dobb, rabbi of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Rockville, Maryland. "I joke that you can even include things about toothpaste and toilet seats. I'm three-quarters facetious on that."

Regardless of what a couple puts in their *ketubah*, the process of sitting down together to discuss their relationship and their future can be a very important step in the marriage process, rabbis say. The finished document then becomes a blueprint that the couple can refer back to, not so much for *toothpaste* etiquette as for a reminder of the shared love and aspirations that brought them together on their wedding day.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow and his wife Phyllis Berman, leaders in the liberal Jewish Renewal movement who officiate jointly at weddings, require couples to write what he describes as "a real *ketubah*," addressing such issues as child care, gender roles and property ownership.

Like the innovations in the wedding ceremony, egalitarian changes to the *ketubah* make some nervous. Even some outspoken liberal rabbis are concerned that an alternative *ketubah* won't be considered a legal document under Jewish law. When a couple uses an unusual *ketubah*, Levithan, the JCC rabbi, has them sign a traditional one, too. (Levithan, however, draws the line at male-only witnesses.)

For more visible displays of equality, couples most frequently consider other rituals that are not so entrenched in Jewish law. Rabbis rarely object to having both bride and groom break a glass, or to having them circle one another in a variation on the ritual in which, traditionally in Orthodox weddings, the bride circled the groom seven times to protect him from evil spirits or the glances of other women. The *bedeken*, or veiling ceremony, in which the groom peeks under the bride's veil, is based on the biblical mix-up when Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. To complement the tradition of the groom putting the veil over the bride's face just before the wedding begins, some rabbis are having the bride place an article of clothing—like a yarmulke—on the groom.

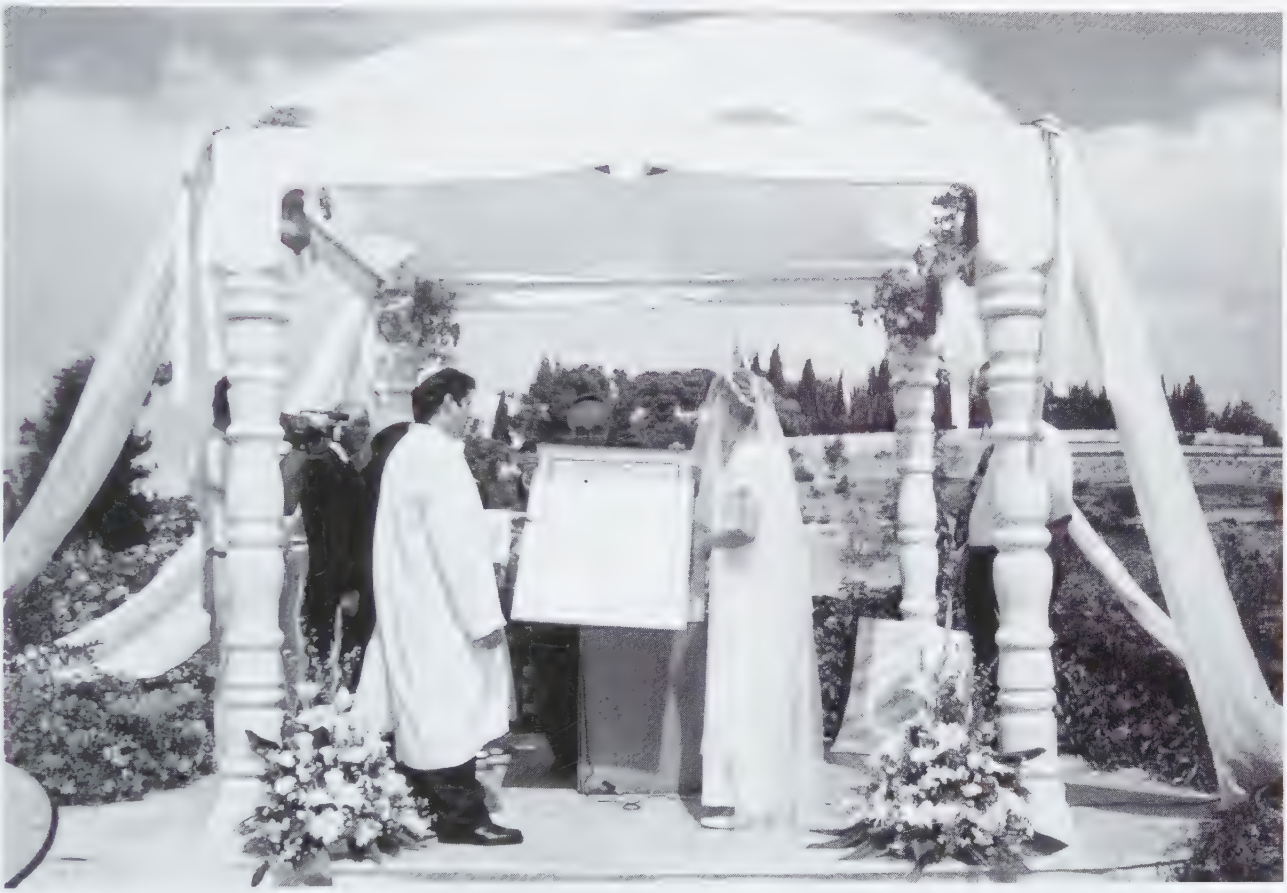
None of these modifications really address the feminist problems that arise from the original rituals: To what extent did the woman's circling put her in symbolic (or actual) thrall to her husband? Is the very reference to the veiled Leah an insult to women in an age when we no longer hide our faces? To what extent does the breaking of the glass signal male power—or his potency—later that evening?

Still, for those who are not tripped up by historical echoes, new interpretations may signal a new ethic. Dobb uses the adaptation of the *bedeken* to reinterpret the meaning of the custom. "It's about deeply knowing the other and about seeing through whatever veils circumstances put upon on the other," he said. He takes the same approach to other aspects of the wedding: "We need to emphasize the spiritual and emotional side of the symbol rather than its historical side."

Heidi Gralla is a freelance writer living in New York.

Running the Orthodox Rabbinic Gauntlet in Israel

by Michele Chabin



ELIAHU LATZER

When I first visited Israel during the summer of 1978, I was struck by how effortless it was to live a religiously observant life in the Jewish State. In Jerusalem, where I moved from New York 12 years ago, kosher restaurants outnumber non-kosher ones, and almost every street boasts a synagogue. Yet as much as I cherish the quiet of a Jerusalem Shabbat afternoon and the lilting sound of Hebrew everywhere I go, there is no denying that some things in Israel are more difficult than they were in the Old Country.

Getting married is one of them.

Just over a year ago, I met my husband to be, "Fiddler on the Roof" style, through two local matchmakers. A few months ago, we held our wedding in a garden overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem. Marrying in Israel meant that before we could hold our ceremony, before we could integrate the best of Jewish tradition and modern enlightenment, we first had to deal with the Rabbinate.

An Orthodox institution of the Israeli government, the Rabbinate has sole authority over Jewish marriages in Israel. Only Orthodox rabbis approved by the Rabbinate may perform a wedding, and they are forbidden to officiate at a mixed marriage. Furthermore, any Jewish marriage performed in Israel by a non-Orthodox rabbi isn't recognized by the state.

Several of our friends had shared their experiences in running the rabbinic gauntlet. Most had warned of endless red tape, running from office to office, days spent trying to prove that they really were Jewish and/or truly single. And so we prepared ourselves for the worst.

Our first stop was the Beit Din, or rabbinic court, in Jerusalem, whose clerks are notoriously slow and often sexist. To prove my Jewishness, I was armed with my parents' *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract) and a note from my childhood rabbi. Sid, whose divorce had been processed by this very Beit Din, brought along his divorce papers.

A clerk, approving our papers, instructed us to return with two male witnesses each, to testify before three rabbini-

cal judges that we were Jewish and single. Sid, who is a modern-Orthodox rabbi, insisted that women could serve as witnesses in such matters; the clerk refused to listen. Sid persisted with a supervisor, and finally we prevailed.

After receiving the Beit Din's official stamp of approval, our next stop was the Rabbinate's marriage licensing office. To our delight, the clerk okayed my childhood rabbi's request to perform our wedding. This was a triumph, since my rabbi leads a traditional, not Orthodox, congregation, and we had worried that the agency might not find him "kosher" enough for their approval. Less delightful was my mandatory meeting with a female clerk, who insisted on knowing whether I would be menstruating on my wedding day. Although Jewish law permits marriages while a bride is in "*niddah*"—ritual impurity—the Beit Din sometimes refuses to permit the wedding on that date. I pre-empted the clerk before she could whip out her calendar and told her what all savvy Israeli women tell these clerks: "My gynecologist has put me on the pill, so I won't have my period on my wedding night."

> In Israel they want to know just the facts, ma'am: Your witnesses? (Better be only men.) Is your mother Jewish? (Prove it.) Menstruating on your wedding day? (Change the date.)

The next hurdle was the court-mandated pre-nuptial bridal classes, to learn the laws of *taharat mishpacha*, family purity. These laws govern when a woman may or may not have sexual relations with her husband. All Jewish brides-to-be in Israel must take these classes, regardless of their level of religious observance. Grooms do not have to attend. The Rabbinate will not permit a marriage to take place unless a teacher provides a note stating that a woman has completed the course.

Overall Sid and I were treated with respect, perhaps due to my intentionally modest dress and Sid's rabbinic title; others we've met were accorded far less courtesy. Still, there were many hoops to jump through before we could get down to the business of planning our actual ceremony, one that was traditional but respected the bride's integrity (mine!), and figuring out how we wanted the state to label us afterward. I decided to circle Sid seven times under the wedding canopy, as my foremothers, of blessed memory, had done before me, despite the fact that some consider this ritual sexist. I may have created a new tradition at the *bedeken*, the ritual at which the groom comes to the bride and peers under her veil, by greeting my groom in a Minnie Mouse mask. Fortunately, I was able to retain my surname following the wedding. Until relatively recently, Israel's Ministry of the Interior automatically changed a bride's name to her husband's. That practice, thank goodness, is a thing of the past. ■

Michele Chabin is a journalist based in Jerusalem.

A Reform Rabbi in Jerusalem Tells How She's Changing Things

The majority of Israelis who wed still abide by the strict rules of the Orthodox Rabbinate. But, according to one Reform rabbi in Israel, that won't last long.

"I think there's a major shift that's almost glacial in its implications," Rabbi Naamah Kelman, of the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, told LILITH. "Basically for the past five years, Israelis couples are voting with their feet and opting out of official Rabbinate weddings."

According to Kelman, working on a doctoral thesis about Israelis who have "taken back" life-cycle rituals from Orthodox authorities, Israelis are choosing secular, Reform and Conservative weddings over Orthodox ones. Because these have no legal standing in Israel, they must be paired with a civil service held abroad. Despite these hurdles, says Kelman, rabbis in liberal Tel Aviv are "overwhelmed," some performing as many as 150 weddings a year.

"People who can choose a range of life experiences are beginning to say, 'Wait a minute. I can't choose how I'm going to get married and who's going to do it?...I choose my DJ, I choose my caterer and I want to choose my rabbi as well.'"

There's a feminist piece as well. "I think Israeli women increasingly refuse to buy into the charade of going to the *mikvah*, being a nonentity at the wedding and so on."

Now that people are taking control over their weddings, what are the radical innovations? "They're not at all radical," says Kelman, the first woman to be ordained in Israel by Hebrew Union College. "To most Americans they would seem laughable." She lists an egalitarian *ketubah*, the fact that men and women can hold the *huppah*, the presence of a personable rabbi who relates to the couple. "I'm willing travel all over the country for these [weddings] because of the impact. It's aesthetic, it's meaningful, it expresses who the couple is—and this [in Israel] is revolutionary."

Kelman recounts a wedding she did, held on a moshav. Kelman read from the Song of Songs, spoke comfortably to the couple, made it personal. The entire time, she says, the bride's mother stood under the *huppah* with her jaw dropped. "I wondered, did I have a stain on my suit, what?...When the wedding was over, she grabbed me and said, 'I want to thank you. You gave me back Judaism today.'"

—Sarah Blustain

The Wedding Photographer Tells All:

"The Camera Is My Crystal Ball."

by Flash Rosenberg

FLASH ROSENBERG

I shoot weddings for a living. Most of my art photographer friends "moved on" to do commercial, editorial, or fashion photography. But I purposely stayed with weddings. Give me the poetry of the sentimental moment over the selling of unnecessary products any day. To me, the "news" of two people joining together is the most compelling story in the world. I marvel at marital vows because they are the only milestone declared willy-nilly *before* it happens.

You don't have a birthday before you are born. You don't get your diploma the first day of nursery school. So how on earth how on earth do you get away with declaring you are going to love someone *forever*...before you do? Such a wild leap of faith! I am equally charmed and baffled by the conceit of such certainty in the face of overwhelming evidence that life rarely goes as planned. And miraculously, I get paid to watch.

> Studying lovers for hours on end can predict "marital durability."

I've shot so many weddings, I feel "shot"—blissfully inoculated against getting married myself. I'm not cynical, just way beyond my limit. Most people have only one, or at most eight weddings. I've had hundreds. I've lived so many weddings, I've gotten over imagining my own.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a hopeless romantic, utterly fascinated by love. And I am profoundly involved in the weddings I shoot. Which is the whole seduction of the experience. Suddenly I am an intimate of a family I just met. A confidante of the bride. Respected authority about what should happen next. Bearer of safety pins, and frank informer that you have ►

lipstick on your teeth. I lurk for hours, greedily observing everything. Awash in the lyrical texture of the occasion, I can't help but feel an innocent sort of sexual charge. Copious food, tender lighting, and highly orchestrated flowers form a sumptuous backdrop for this most sensuous of theatrical events. All that hugging and touching! The nonchalant caress of a mother's hand on a daughter's cheek, the attendants fussing a bride into her dress, the sudden awkwardness that overcomes even the boldest groom, quietly thrills me.

All that hugging and touching quietly thrills me!

And then there are the clothes. Any occasion where you have to "decide what to wear" enhances anticipation of the event, even when you grumble bitterly about it. The sheer discomfort of dressing-up is so sweetly erotic. When clothes are new and mildly uncomfortable, people become more conscious of their bodies. The individual yet collective desire to get out of such clothes makes a crowd bristle with an unspoken corporeal tension. After all, isn't the implicit goal of looking beautiful to invite dishevelment? There's an erotic charge to being the Designated Voyeur. Yes, I get turned on.

The ultimate discomfort comes in wearing white. White is simultaneously bold (Wow! Stark, striking and assertive.) and vulnerable (Ow! It gets dirty so easy.). And best of all, a white gown magically transforms every bride into an imbued miracle. No kidding. To be the walking embodiment of LOVE for a moment in one's life is a generous gift to share with all those invited who have ever dared or hoped or dreaded to love. At this point in relationship history, white seems less about "virginal purity" and more like a fresh sheet of paper for reinventing the terms for a co-joined life. So I think it's rather sad when a bride thinks she's too evolved to wear white. Besides, for photographic purposes, it is so much easier for me to keep track of the bride when she's thoughtfully wearing a glaring white schmatte.

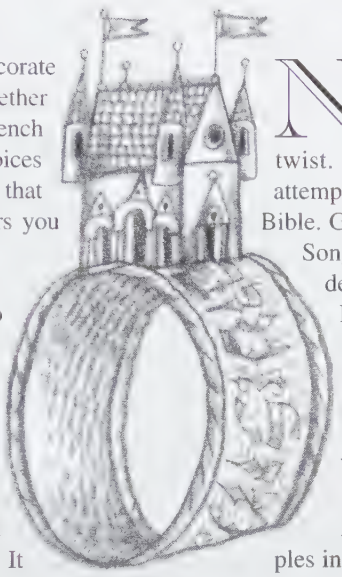
I've come to understand that photographing weddings is nothing less than a secret form of "female" pornography. Not in a rude way. But as a complete inverse of traditional "male" pornography. Instead of paying to peep at disassociated strangers as sexual objects, I get paid to watch while accelerating associations and emotions. Right away, I'm calling the bride and groom's relatives "Mom," "Dad," "Grandma," or "Dear" while posing shots—though clearly a part of my pleasure as observer is to stay on the right side of propriety, to make it safe for the care that exists between the family and friends to be openly expressed.

That respectfulness is not abstract, nor distancing. Thinking about how one relates to a situation is a classic joy for women. So as a never-married person, I am genuinely in awe of the bride's great plunge, while she relies on me to reassure her that she looks great, that everyone is having fun, that ►

FLASH ROSENBERG

Make Your Wedding Reflect Your Values

The world does not turn on whether you decorate with stargazer lilies or white roses, on whether you wear your hair in a chignon or a French twist. But you *can* change the world with other choices you make in planning your wedding. In the belief that these choices can reflect your values, Lilith offers you some practical suggestions:



Heidi Gralla and Dean Chang wanted to break though the silent wall that usually stands between members of the bride's side and the groom's. Reporters both, their wedding program was framed as a newspaper article from "The Wedding Times," and introduced the entire list of 240 guests. Inside they included loving introductions to their wedding party. Gralla and Chang also crafted a *ketubah* to match their lives. It reads in part: "Let our days be filled with lasting friendships and meaningful debate, sunny afternoons in Saratoga, take-out menus and foolproof recipes, good seats and good fortune." Gralla explained: "Initially, we were just trying to make the [*ketubah*] text a little less stodgy and serious, but as we worked on it together, we ended up having a surprisingly meaningful discussion about our future."

Dear departed relatives are often a phantom presence at any lifecycle event. Rabbi Susan Schnur asks couples if they would like to give her in advance a small bag with talismans that represent the people they are missing—a photo, a locket, some small object. She puts the bag on the table that stands under the *huppah*. "I always give them permission to use this table as a kind of shrine. It's very powerful that these objects are private in the context of this public ceremony." And she speaks about dead relatives or friends, "'We also keep in mind the love of Grandpa Dave. We take responsibility as a community to be witnesses in his stead.' This teaches that joy is inclusive; the sad thing becomes a part of that joy. It's a realistic idea of marriage—you're going to laugh, and cry too."

Eager to connect your wedding to Jewish history? The Lower East Side Tenement Museum now welcomes wedding parties. A historical tenement, the museum housed some 10,000 working-class immigrants in its residential days. Ceremonies may be preceded by a historical program—a recent one featured a Sephardic girl who emigrated from Turkey around 1914. And after the ceremony, guests may dine on recipes from the building's former residents. Contact: Sara Abraham, 212-334-2278; www.tenement.org.

Neot Kedumim: The Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel has become a popular spot for weddings with an educational twist. A nature preserve, Neot Kedumim attempts to recreate the physical setting of the Bible. Guests are offered a tour of the Dale of the Song of Songs, "to see how the Scriptures depicts love," arriving at the banks of the Pool of Solomon, where a *huppah* stands. (Contact: 972-8-977-0777; fax 972-8-977-0766; e-mailgen_info@neot-kedumim.org.il; www.neot-kedumim.org.il)

Rabbi Susan Schnur casts the *mitzvah* of giving *tzedakah* very beautifully when she meets with couples in advance of their wedding: "This is a time of incredible privilege," she tells them. "You have someone you love who loves you back, you have the privilege of being able to have a legal wedding consecrated before family and friends." She instructs the couple in ways they can translate their privilege into acts of charity. "I give couples a lot of different options; for example, they can choose seven different charities, for the seven wedding blessings. 'You believe in this stuff, get it out there,' I tell them." Rabbi Nancy Wiener in her new book, *Beyond Breaking the Glass: Planning Your Reform Jewish Wedding* (forthcoming from the Central Conference of American Rabbis), has several suggestions for appropriate wedding charities, including Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger, which produces table cards encouraging guests to contribute. (Mazon, 310-442-0020; e-mail mazonmail@aol.com; www.mazon.org) And plan in advance to have someone deliver leftover wedding food to a soup kitchen or shelter.

Even the traditional corny bridal shower can be made to serve your values. How about a "mitzvah shower" in place of the traditional gift-laden one? Or a shower to practice with your friends the traditional Jewish circle dances for the wedding? Lilith Magazine has published these and many more alternative practices to enhance your wedding celebration. "A Huppah Quilting Bee" involves bride, groom, and far-flung friends in creating the *huppah* itself. "Beyond Belly Joy," on socially responsible weddings, helps couples create a modest celebration, directing money they might have spent on a lavish wedding to those in need. **To order the full packet of LILITH's wedding revelations ($12) call toll free 1-888-2-LILITH.** ■

all is going well. This mutual alliance of appreciation inspires confidence and confidences. This is the most emotionally alluring aspect of being a photographer. And it's in this ephemeral frenzy of intimacy (with no lingering responsibilities other than to deliver the pictures) that makes wedding photography feel pornographic in the most honorable sense. No wonder I never tire of shooting weddings.

Oh! the things I am permitted to see. The camera is far more than a gadget for exposing negatives. Taking a picture is easy. Drop a camera on its shutter button, it'll click off a shot. The real trick is to use the lens as a crystal ball. I have rather accurately predicted the future of most marriages I have documented. Studying lovers for hours on end offers an unobstructed view of the visible and visceral elements in their relationship. Marital durability is not seen in the obvious. It's not in the perfection of smiles, the posture of the family, the grace of the ceremony, nor in the quality of the weather. (No, rain does not mean "luck," it just means a dreary background.) Likewise, pouts, trivial tantrums, and obvious bad behavior are not automatic signs that things won't work out. (Though the time I caught a groom crouched behind the bar, drunkenly tongue-kissing a bridesmaid, I was not surprised to get a call a few years later, hiring me to shoot the bride's second wedding.) The success of a marriage is based on an exquisite whisper of a blink. It is revealed in an almost imperceptible gesture between winning partners I call the "Conspiratorial Glance." It's neither cloying nor desperate, but a palpable connection that indicates the couple is in cosmic cahoots about all that is simultaneously profound and ridiculous about a wedding. When that synchronized heartbeat happens, I predict they have a real chance.

> A couple's 'Conspiratorial Glance' tells me that they are in cosmic cahoots.

But in my role as photographer, the marriage "lasting" isn't as much of a priority as making the *memory* of the day last. It's more than a coincidence that as a child, my favorite storybook was my parents' wedding album. A book that remains by far, the most enchanting fairy tale of all. And a curiosity. "What was everyone I loved doing there without me?" That's how "Once upon a time..." came to very specifically mean the time when I wasn't at my parents wedding. And that memory inspires who I am ultimately shooting for. Beyond the immediate client, I am preserving pictures for some phantom in the future, who will stare at all these folks she loves, while wondering about who they were "back when they were young"..."back before I was me."

So I am impelled to capture the specific sense of being in *this* moment, with *this* family, in the tradition as it is being

I Am An Endangered Spirit

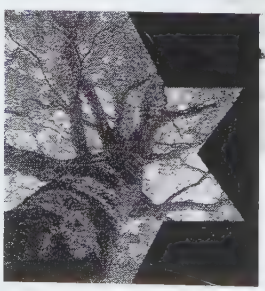
Endangered Spirit • A Jewish Outdoor Adventure Program

SEDONA ARIZONA ADVENTURE, 1999

I was able to experience the absence of sound, feel the sun on my skin and lift my soul and spirits during our hikes in the mountains and observing Shabbat. I returned centered, and joyous with echoes of laughter from new friends still in my mind.

Catherine Greener
Ann Arbor, MI

Exploring nature from the inside out



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Call us toll-free at 888-202-2930

invented that day. I may shoot a close-up of the groom's dinner plate, a blurry twirl from within the vortex of the *hora*, as well as a gorgeous pose of Table Number 8. Instead of pushing people around, I co-conspire with guests to create pictures that don't trap them foolishly caught with half an hors d'oeuvre in their mouths, but cooperatively consenting to look the way they are loved by the hosts. It's a form of consensus journalism.

Our camaraderie begins when confirming the job the week of the event. I ask each couple, "Is there is anything unusual I should know about your families? Any potential problems anyone may have in posing with anyone? I don't want to inadvertently offend anyone." And recently the answer has resoundingly been, "Nope. Everything's completely normal. Nothing out of the ordinary!" Then I get to the wedding and Mom comes in with her Wife, Dad arrives with his New Wife, (who looks remarkably like the woman who married Mom) and there are numerous complications of siblings and step-siblings who may or may not be speaking. I shot a wedding last summer where all four parents had been divorced and remarried. But again, no one thought to clue me in. And I take all this as good news! Because it means the "kids," the ones getting married, are taking all the formerly diagnosed deviations in stride. They are adjusted in refreshingly new ways, which cheers me to the bone.

Although it's not always so easy. Last summer I was cautioned by a groom that his bride's mother absolutely would not appear in the same room, let alone same photo, as her father. The bride was faintly hopeful that the wedding might offer a chance for some minimal rapprochement, but when the moment to pose for collected family shot arrived, the bride looked terribly weak and tense. All I could think to say was, "At this time I'd like to invite all who support the bride and groom to come stand with them." And miraculously both her parents gently rose to stand on opposite sides of the grouping.

It's in moments like these that I am blessed with seeing the real fairy tale behind a wedding. For it's not in the details of making a pristine party that the myth resides, but in the fumbling to expand one's heart. No matter how many times I witness it, I can't help but be mist up when I see the ability to love increasing within one soul. And I don't just mean in the expected vibrations between the bride and groom, but in all the nuances of love and difficulty connecting everyone invited to the affair. When an irreverently hip couple decide it's okay to please their parents. When a feminist allows her heart, not rhetoric, to define what's independence. When bitter parents rise to honor their children. When the guests review their own liaisons and hold each other closer as they dance through the reception. Then even I begin to doubt my boast that I never want to get married. A wedding dares us to believe in the possibility of our own enchantment.

Flash Rosenberg, a performer, photographer and illustrator, is worried that no one will hire her to shoot weddings since she has confessed it's a form of pornography. She can be reached at Flashberg@aol.com.

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The Personal Becomes Political

Women's Issues in Caring for the Elderly

BY ELEANOR J. BADER

At the start of the 20th century, three million Americans were over the age of 65. A hundred years later—thanks to advances in medical science, nutrition and workplace safety—the figure has soared to 35 million. This trend is expected to continue and demographers estimate that by 2030 the U.S. will be home to 70 million elderly adults; in fact, the fastest growing population cohort is likely to be comprised of those 85 and older. While many will be healthy, vital and active, others will require a plethora of medical and social services. Not surprisingly, how these services are delivered and paid for, and by whom, has risen to the top of the nation's policymaking agenda.

Indeed, caregiving got a significant boost in 1999 when President Clinton unveiled a five-year, $121 million proposal for a National Family Caregiver Support Program in his State of the Union address. Although the proposal was stymied by Congress, it cast a spotlight on long-term care issues and prompted a host of conferences, speak-outs and articles about the needs of both care recipients and care givers, most of whom provide in-home assistance to a frail or infirm spouse, parent or other relative. For the first time, a program of tax credits, expanded social services and workplace education landed on the national agenda.

"More than 200 Congress members are baby boomers who see that support for long-term caregivers is an absolute essential reality in the lives of most people," says Jeanette Takamura, Assistant Secretary of the Administration on Aging. "If we do not support caregivers, we're going to need to find another way to care for elderly people. We know that people prefer informal care at home. But caregivers who are depleted energy-wise, work-wise, or money-wise present an unfortunate scenario. We are looking at programs and supports to keep whole families well."

These programs can take a variety of forms, and eldercare advocates approach caregiving from numerous directions. Some have set up model programs at the state and local levels to provide referrals, counseling and concrete services. Others advocate large-scale policy changes—Medicaid, Medicare and nursing home reform—that will have an impact on large numbers of people. Still others are mired in debates about how to undo society's preoccupation with youth and eradicate the ageism that makes senior citizens—even the able-bodied and self-sufficient—feel invisible. While specific communities, among them Jews, Holocaust survivors, immigrants, people of color and women, have come together to focus on the particular needs of their constituencies, by and large all agree that we are barreling toward a caregiving crisis of unprecedented proportions.

According to "Rough Crossings: Family Caregivers' Odysseys Through the Health Care System," a 1998 report published by the New York-based United Hospital Fund, a research and philanthropic group, "Each year more than 60 million Americans are admitted to or discharged from health care facilities. For institutions, these entries and departures are routine processes; for patients and their families, they are often fraught with anxiety and fear."

The caregivers interviewed for "Rough Crossings" offered poignant testimony about their assumed roles. One woman described being unprepared for her husband's fury. "'He was full of anger and insults. It was part of the illness but I didn't know it,'" she said. When a well-meaning friend advised her to be "more understanding," she retorted, "'How can you be understanding when you don't understand?'" The husband of a woman who underwent leg surgery told interviewers that when his wife was discharged from the hospital he expected her to be "well enough to go home." During his first night with her, he woke up to find the bed wet and her bandages oozing. "'I didn't know what to do,' he recalled, 'who to call or who to get angry at.'"

These caregivers are not anomalies. The United Hospital Fund's Families and Health Care Project estimates that at least 25 million Americans—one in eight adults—are currently providing ongoing, in-home care to a loved one. Few were knowledgeable about medical issues before they took on this role; most learned everything by trial and error, from how to clean a feeding tube to how to change a bandage. On average, caregivers—at least three-quarters of whom are women—provide 18 hours of care per week for a period of four-and-a-half years; their work represents unpaid labor that the Fund estimates is worth approximately $200 billion per year. In addition, nearly half of the nation's caregivers have children under 18 living at home and the lion's share, two-thirds, hold jobs while caring for an elderly family member.

The needs of these often heroic caregivers are complex

A DAY IN THE LIFE...

One of my close friends provides a human exam
ple to buttress the statistics about how much
unpaid labor "informal" caregivers provide to th
elderly. "Barbara"–who doesn't want her real
name used because she "doesn't want any of m
dear relatives to think that attending to them
presses on me"–triages the needs of elderly
family members every day. Here are some of the
routines she describes:

MY MOM, 85.

Competent, mentally very alert, she lives in an old building in Brooklyn where most of the people her age have either died or moved. Mom's windows don't seal, the boiler goes off in winter inexplicably, there are small fires from old wiring. Simple things become complicated. Although she's able to have deliveries of food, she can't dispose of her garbage, because the kids in the building leave big windows open in the hall and it's very drafty. So she's basically confined to her living quarters. She used to escape to Florida for a few weeks in the coldest weather, but most of the people she saw down there are now in homes or they're dead. And the inexpensive South Beach hotels have been yuppified, so she doesn't have a familiar place to go to.

I call her twice a day. Every morning now I ask: "Ma, do you have heat?"

When she was sick this winter, the worst thing was that her older friends were afraid to come, afraid of catching the flu. I spend at least one day a week there, and recently more than that. It's hard for her to shop now, so I'll bring a whole shopping bag of things I've bought; she'll pick and I'll return the stuff. Some incidents are sweetly funny. My mother needed a comforter. This comforter is something she puts near her, so it can't be too heavy, too light, too scratchy. We went out to find one, but the wind picked up, and she was afraid to walk from the car to the bedding store. I went in and explained, so the saleswoman brought a sample out to the car half a block away!

and by no means monolithic, but advocates believe that federal-level reforms will go a long way in making it easier for caregivers to care. Most would start by altering the scope and purpose of Medicare. "Medicare was started in 1965 as a way to provide acute care services to elderly and disabled people," says Carol Levine, director of the Families and Health Care Project of the United Hospital Fund. "As the population has aged and as chronic disease has become a more significant part of health care, Medicare no longer fits the bill. It was not designed to be for chronic care. The only people who can get Medicare to pay for homecare are those defined as homebound. People who have cancer, who maintain a life and go out, even if only to the doctor's office, are not considered homebound even if they are terminal. This works against the well-being of the patient."

So does Medicare's policy on prescription drugs. According to Diana Aviv, the D.C.-based associate vice president for Public Policy of United Jewish Communities, an organization created by the merger of United Israel Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and United Jewish Appeal, Medicare only pays for prescription drugs if they are prescribed while a person is receiving in-patient care. "There's a tremendous need to expand coverage for people who are not hospitalized," she says. "Most treatments now involve shorter hospital stays because of advances in prescription drugs. Well, if the drugs aren't covered, what good does that do older people?"

Marcia Holman, director of Care Management for the Pelican Health Corp., a for-profit care management agency established by the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services in New York, sees the fragmented manner in which services are delivered as another area ripe for reform. "We have programs and policies that vary from state to state and leave big gaps in availability and access. Older people believe that if they have Medicare and supplemental long term care insurance they're okay. But many supplemental policies only provide homecare if a person is unable to perform the functions of daily living, things like getting dressed, toileting, moving from one place to another, preparing meals and bathing. This means that an insulin-dependent diabetic who can perform the skills of daily living but cannot see well enough to self-inject will probably not be eligible for homecare."

Holman's outrage about America's idiosyncratic provision of care is palpable. "We need to acknowledge that what we have now is a dysfunctional array of services that are not coordinated or easy to obtain. Even without major policy changes it would be nice if within the 50 states the definition of skilled nursing or assisted living was uniform. We could also provide people with information about their right to a health care proxy if they can no longer make their own decisions. We could educate people about Medicare and supplemental insurance and what these policies actually pay for. We could talk about retirement before people are ready to retire. Most families are so overwhelmed they put off facing what they don't have to. They are already doing too much, but we still expect family caregivers to step in and navigate a hodge-podge of programs when the need arises."

Attorney Peter J. Strauss, a nationally recognized elder law specialist, agrees that people need coordinated services. In addition, he favors expanding Medicare to cover long term and chronic care. "I would add a Part D to Medicare," he says. "Everyone says this is not doable, that we cannot add $140 billion to the national budget, but if we increased the payroll tax by about $220 per year, with an employer match, we'd raise more than enough money. There is no alternative except a national system of long term and chronic care. Yes, it will be expensive, but what else are we spending money on?"

> "GENDER IS ONE OF THE REASONS CAREGIVING HAS RECEIVED SO LITTLE ATTENTION. LEGISLATURES ARE DOMINATED BY MEN AND FOR THE MOST PART THEY ARE NOT AS INVOLVED IN CAREGIVING." —CAROL LEVINE

What, indeed? Long term care costs an average of $130 per day, an amount beyond the reach of many Americans. Social Security payments to retirees average $745 per month, with a maximum benefit of $1326. Women—the majority of care givers and care recipients because they live longer—receive an average allocation of $611 based on lifetime earnings that are typically less than men's. Furthermore, time spent outside the paid labor force raising children or caring for elderly or disabled family members is not counted in benefit calculations. Worse, only 16% of retired women receive pensions and once again, those who do are shortchanged. The median female pension totals $2682 per year; mens' median is $5731. Predictably, poverty among women over the age of 65 is twice as severe as it is for men their age. And the situation is unlikely to improve. A 1998 study by Heinz Family Philanthropies found that 41% of women between the ages of 25 and 55 fear living in poverty as they age because their salaries do not allow them to adequately save for retirement.

Is it any wonder that these women are called the "sandwich generation," wedged between their jobs and the child and elder care responsibilities that fall to them? "Despite talk about more egalitarian marriages and stay-at-home fathers, I don't see much

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW, 86.
Rae took sick with pneumonia Christmas Day. Her boyfriend, who lives with her, kept calling my husband's work number. Finally my sister-in-law got hold of us at home. We called a private ambulance—911 would have taken her to nearest hospital, which is not a very good one; you know things like that about 911 when you live in Brooklyn—and they took her to the Manhattan hospital where her Alzheimer's doctors are.

After Rae got back home from the hospital, I drove my mother to visit her. Then I drove my mother back and picked up my uncle Morrie (it's hard to get into a cab in Brooklyn in the snow) and took them to a diner they wanted to go to. While they were eating I went off to buy some plastic so that my husband and I could seal a leaky window in Mom's apartment. My husband, meanwhile was taking *his* mother for a walk.

(My sister-in-law found Rae's doctors, and goes with her mother to all her appointments. Then I call to find out what the doctors have said. Then I remind my husband to call his mother, to visit, etc. No surprises here; the women are overinvolved and the men underinvolved.)

MY AUNT, 85.
My aunt was also desperate for a visit that same day; her son is "a very important busy man," she often says. So—after the shopping for my mother and my uncle, and after I go back to the diner to get them and take them home, and return to my mother-in-law's to talk over her care—we pick up some things for my aunt at the bakery and we go to

evidence of caregiving becoming associated with men," says Rose Dobrof, Brookdale professor of gerontology at the Hunter College School of Social Work in New York and a nationally renown expert on aging. "It's a strange thing. Maybe because women know in their guts that they are going to be recipients of care, they become caregivers as a way of shoring up brownie points."

"Women who were touched by or involved in the feminist movement have a greater willingness to talk about problems and expect the system to meet at least some of their needs," adds Carol Levine. "But there is still reticence about speaking out, fear that you are being disloyal to family members if you ask for help. Gender is one of the reasons caregiving has received so little attention. Legislatures are dominated by men and for the most part they are not as involved in caregiving. Women need to make alliances with male caregivers and use their power to make this everybody's issue."

> "DESPITE TALK ABOUT MORE EGALITARIAN MARRIAGES AND STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS, I DON'T SEE MUCH EVIDENCE OF CARE-GIVING BECOMING ASSOCIATED WITH MEN." —DR. ROSE DOBROF

Levine acknowledges that the anti-feminist backlash of the past 20 years may make this easier said than done. "At the same time as people are speaking out about how hard it is to be a family caregiver, there is a counter theme being promoted," she continues, "that the rewards of caregiving are so enormous, that this is such a profoundly moving experience, that nothing else compares. It's a romanticization of caregiving, an indirect way of saying to women that they're better off going back to this role because of the spiritual rewards. It feeds into a backlash to return women to the home and is something to watch."

Unfortunately, caregivers rarely have time to ponder political imperatives, grappling instead with the day-to-day realities of work, family obligations and personal needs. "Helping families carry the financial burden of care is by far the most important issue," says Rose Dobrof, "but families also need support services and respite care. Caregivers need to know that there is a phone call they can make to get information or have someone listen. Groups are essential. There is magic in getting people who are in the same boat together. It is so supportive, transformative, to be in a room and let wives speak about hating their dependent husbands or children speak about hating their dependent parents."

And then there is respite care, something experts consider the most important form of caregiver assistance. State, city and privately-funded respite programs across the country offer a variety of services, from adult day care that affords caregivers a modicum of leisure, to holiday or weekend retreats, to in-home nursing or therapeutic services. The Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale, in the Bronx, began the nation's first overnight respite program in June 1998. "We started the Elderserve at Night program when we realized that if caregivers could get a good night's sleep they could probably continue caring for the person at home," says Ann Marie Levine, Associate Administrator of Adult Day Services at the Home. "Many [elderly] people suffer from sundowning syndrome, a condition that leads them to become confused and agitated when day turns into night. These patients, suffering from dementia, need activities. We do massage, aroma therapy and Raiki to help clients become calmer. Some are up all night, some sleep for an hour or two, but if they are up we engage them with sensory stimulation." Patients can be at the Home for up to 12 hours per night, seven nights a week; the service is covered by Medicaid, some private insurance plans, or can be paid for out-of-pocket. The model is presently being studied for possible replication in Florida and Rhode Island.

Other locales offer variations on the theme. The Family Caregiver Alliance, a state-funded program in California, runs periodic weekend retreats for care providers. "We give caregivers manicures and massages, things to help them feel better, more cared for," says Kathleen Kelly, the Alliance's executive director. "We provide fun and good food on a sliding fee scale." New Jersey funds respite care and a host of services, including low cost prescription drugs, for the elderly and infirm through an eight percent tax on casino revenues that has been levied since 1977. Pennsylvania funds its services through a state lottery. Still other states have begun to use tobacco settlement monies for eldercare.

While these efforts should be lauded, it is private philanthropies, many of them religious, that have created most of the models that states and cities have duplicated. Jewish philanthropies, from UJA-Federation to Selfhelp Community Services, have created projects to benefit both caregivers and care recipients. Still, it is only in the last few years that the issue has captured the attention of the general Jewish community.

Rabbi Richard Address, director of the three-year-old Department of Jewish Family Concerns at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, is charged with developing programs to deal with the graying of congregations—it is estimated that 30% of Reform Jews are over 60—and creating forums to deal with changes within the Jewish family. His goal is to raise awareness of aging issues, including caregiv-

Queens to brighten her day for half an hour. There is no down time at all. It's a whole day, from morning to night. I don't mind doing it, but this is the reason I will *not* work full time.

MY UNCLE, 94.

Last winter my Mom went to Florida, so I called Morrie every day. He didn't answer late one night. Next morning also no answer. I took my husband down to Brooklyn and we knocked. No answer. Then a little voice says "help." Morrie had fallen between his bed and the wall and had been lying there for 18 hours. He was in hospital for weeks with a respiratory infection from being on that cold floor. But does anybody wear those warning buttons around their necks? No. It's ridiculous.

UJA-Federation is talking about building assisted living apartments, but rents will be five or six thousand dollars a month! You could work your whole life for a Jewish nonprofit and not be able to retire to one of these facilities. My mom needs an affordable environment where she's physically comfortable, with some people like herself so she can socialize for meals. Isolation is the worst for her.

I said to her last Sunday, "I'll see you Tuesday." And she said sadly, "That's two days away."

—Susan Weidman Schneider

ing, in the 880 Reform congregations in North America.

But how to do this? According to Address, several synagogues have started committees to provide voluntary services to elderly congregants. Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, for one, has raised money to establish a transportation support program. "It's a voucher program for people who don't drive anymore or who don't drive at night. Say they want to go to a lecture at the Temple. The congregation will send a car to pick them up and drop them off and the cost is picked up by the synagogue," says Address. Other *shuls* have organized home visits to shut-ins and taught seniors to use on-line resources to ameliorate their isolation.

"We are also developing rituals for older adults, spinning off the traditional blessings," says Address. "The Gomel, the traditional blessing for passing through something dangerous, has been adapted so that it can be used to thank God for new life passages, a new relationship, the successful beating of cancer, or the completion of chemotherapy. We are developing rituals to welcome people into nursing homes and prayers to say when someone moves out of the family home. There is a *mezuzah* ceremony when they move in to a new home. But when they leave the house where they raised children, or sat *shiva*, or spent 25 years, there is nothing. We're asking ourselves to what extent a synagogue should take on social service responsibilities. The bottom line is that Judaism commands us to take care of our physical and mental health so that we can be in a relationship with God. We also have a *mitzvah*-driven responsibility to relate to others."

In addition to the UAHC's efforts, the Grotta Foundation has a mandate to serve the Jewish elderly. [see LILITH, Winter 1999] "Public money is usually not venture capital. Philanthropy money is, so we can fund research and develop programs," says Susan Friedman, executive director of the Foundation. Toward that end, Grotta is funding Synagogue HOPE (Help Opportunity Programs for Elders), an 18-hour caregiver education program that will be offered in 16 New Jersey congregations.

Yet model programs, as good as many are, do not ensure universal benefits for all who need them. "In 1965 we as a nation decided to create Medicare for the elderly and disabled and Medicaid for the indigent," says Marcia Holman of the Pelican Health Corp. "We now need to revisit what we believe about the obligations of government and individuals. Unfortunately, as a society we're ambivalent about government's role in providing or promoting care. We assume that individuals should take full responsibility for family members, but if we want to hold individuals responsible for caregiving, we need to give them the tools to fulfill that responsibility." ■

Eleanor J. Bader is a writer and teacher from Brooklyn, NY.

The Jewish Community: Ahead of the Curve?

When 85-year-old Teddi Schwartz, a retired folksinger, moved into the 2,800-unit Penn South apartment complex in 1962, the New York City resident had no idea that, 25 years later, the Manhattan development would make history.

"Penn South residents are not poor, but by the early 1980s the buildings' Board of Directors came to UJA for help because the units were filled with elderly Jews who needed assistance," says Anita Altman, deputy managing director of the Caring Commission of UJA-Federation. When research revealed that half the residents were over 60, those responsible for the study dubbed Penn South a NORC, or Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. Since then, surveys have identified at least 5,000 potential NORCs across the country.

By 1986, says Altman, the Jewish Home and Hospital, Selfhelp Community Services and the Educational Alliance West had created a model program for Penn South residents that has been replicated nationwide. "An on-site staff provides information and referrals, entitlement counseling, case management and community nursing," says Altman. "We provide non-Medicare-reimbursable services such as the pouring of medication or translating between what the doctor tells a patient and what he or she understands. We monitor meds, take blood pressure and link folks to community-based services such as home care or Meals on Wheels. We also run an adult day care program for people with dementia. And it is all done within Penn South." While there are fees for some services, most cost residents nothing.

"We know that 89 percent of seniors live in their own homes," Altman adds. "Furthermore, we know that when services are provided where people live and are geared to their specific needs, they've got a formal support system that enables them to live meaningful lives for as long as possible."

Teddi Schwartz misses no opportunity to sing the praises of Penn South's Senior Center. "The staff really take an interest in the residents," she says. "I pay a $20 annual membership fee for access to social services, lectures, classes and special events. It's fantastic. They do everything possible to keep people in their homes. That means the world to me."

—EB

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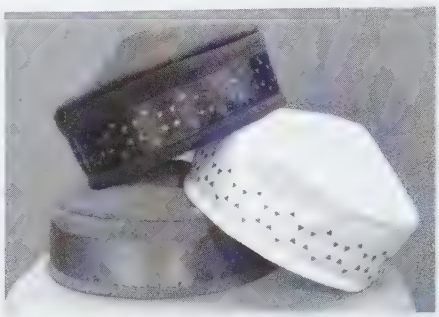

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All Who Are Hungry

continued from page 48

life in spite of the damage I have inflicted on my body in the past. The egg, too, is a symbol of fertility, a reminder that if I feed myself, I will be able to raise a family of my own. The *haroset* and *maror* remind me that to live life fully we must taste both the sweet and the bitter moments. To close our mouths to both is only to hide from life; to open our mouths, as we do at the seder, is to allow ourselves to taste and sing and praise.

Judaism is not a religion of asceticism and self-denial; I am not holy because I can subsist on mustard and carrots alone. Although we sing *dayenu*, "it is enough," today I affirm the opposite: It is not enough. It has not been enough to eat only what is absolutely necessary for survival; this is not the fast God wants of me, nor is it the sacrifice God desires.

I celebrate my freedom from anorexia with a seder because I am now prepared to serve myself and to serve God once again. I have read that no one ever recovers fully from an eating disorder, and my own struggle continues each day. But the seder is a celebration not of the arrival at the promised land, but of the freedom to journey. And it is a celebration as well of the faith and the hope to join arms around the table and open my mouth to sing and pray *"L'shana haba'a b'yirushalayim,"* next year in Jerusalem. ■

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The Yiddish Queen and her "Menersher Kop"

by Sheva Zucker

Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky
translated, edited and introduced by Kathryn Hellerstein
Wayne State University Press, $49.95.

Kadya Molodowsky (1894-1975) is generally considered the greatest female writer in modern Yiddish literature, an assessment that would not entirely have pleased her. Living and creating among male writers who in calling her *"der menersher kop"* (the masculine head) believed they were bestowing on her their greatest praise, it is perhaps not surprising that she bristled at evaluations of writers based on gender rather than ability. In an article entitled "A Few Words about Women Poets," published in the Yiddish journal Signal in 1935, she asserted that terms like "female poetry" or "male poetry" that unnecessarily emphasized the sex of the writer were senseless, for writing was much more an expression of spirit than of sex.

I think Kadya, (as she is affectionately called in Yiddish literary circles), would have been pleased with Kathryn Hellerstein's *Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky,* the first comprehensive English translation of her work, in terms of the selections, the quality of the translations, and Hellerstein's assessment of her. The volume is bilingual, comprising some 150 poems, numerous photos, an introduction and abundant footnotes. Its pages reveal "a poet of the first rank in the history of Yiddish poetry," as Hellerstein writes, who explores a broad range of topics but writes with particular urgency and intimate knowledge about the experiences and struggles of the emerging modern Jewish woman.

Hellerstein is an accomplished translator and critic, best known for her work on the poet Moyshe-Leyb Halperin and her numerous articles on Yiddish female poets. These accomplishments plus a unique combination of poetic, popular and scholarly sensibilities make Hellerstein ideally suited to bring a very important poet to Yiddish and English readers. On occasion, her translations do not capture the idiom and cadence of the Yiddish. At times, by not rhyming, the English loses some of the playfulness, euphony, and irony of the original. At other times, Hellerstein's effort to be faithful to the Yiddish causes the English to be labored. But her translations are always careful and often beautiful, and her introduction and notes greatly help the reader understand Molodowsky's poetry in the context of her life and times.

The title *Paper Bridges* is inspired by several poems about the legendary bridge of paper that the Jews will cross to enter Paradise when the Messiah comes. It is well chosen, for the bridge represents the aspirations of the poet and her people, often dashed, yet constantly shaped afresh, by personal and national creativity, into new dreams and achievements.

As Hellerstein shows in her introduction, Kadya bridged many spheres: religious-secular, Hebrew-Yiddish, male-female, Europe-America, Diaspora-Israel. She was born in White Russia into an educated mercantile family in whose home a portrait of the staunchly secular Zionist leader Theodor Herzl hung side by side with a talmudic scholar, the Vilna Gaon. Kadya began life already rooted in several Jewish worlds. Although girls generally were not given access to Hebrew or Jewish texts, Kadya studied chumash (Pentateuch) with her father, and later both Talmud and Russian with private tutors. Moving to Warsaw in the '20's, she worked by day as a teacher in a socialist Yiddishist Tsisho school, and in the evenings in the Zionist Hebraist community school, again,

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navigating two separate streams of Jewish life. Her religious and Hebrew training, evident in countless allusions in her writing, make her an exception among Yiddish female writers. Herself a fervent Zionist, she married a communist, the historian and literary critic Simkhe Lev, and they lived, from 1935 on, for the most part, in America, with a three year interval in Israel. Conflicts, contradictions, and surprising harmonies!

In her personal and poetic life, Kadya forged new paths for Jewish women, who, like herself, were striving to reconcile the opposing forces of religion and modernity that vied for their souls. Her early volume *Kheshvndike nekht* (*Nights of Heshvan*), published in Vilna in 1927, portrays this struggle. Hellerstein's translation of the poem *"Opgeshite bleter"* ("Fallen Leaves") beautifully captures the inherent tension between freedom and faith. Looking at an old *siddur*, the poet reflects,

> Before me — an old prayerbook
> With yellowed leaves bent at the corners,
> Marking women's prayers about dew and rain.

Aware, however, that her fingers will not be "darkening those lines" through constant use, the poet muses, "Who will turn the yellowed leaves?" By imagining that she will perhaps kiss the *siddur* with her "burning lips" when "a drought falls upon [her] heart," she connects, not through prayer but through the memory of those who prayed, to the tradition and to those who drew sustenance from it. It is a link, but a tenuous one.

In *Dzshike gas (Dzshike Street*, Warsaw, 1933, 1936), named for the very humble street in Jewish Warsaw on which she and Lev lived, Molodowsky passionately attempts to work out "the struggle between the aesthetic and the political responsibilities of the Yiddish poet in times of economic, social, and political hardship." In the title poem, Kadya imagines the street's inhabitants discussing her contemptuously, saying,

> "There she is — the lady singer,
> The devil take her mother, —
> She hangs around here all the time
> And braids our misery into rhymes."

These wonderful lines epitomize the writer's dilemma: The abstract beauty she creates by describing the lives on Dzshike Street is powerless to transform the grim reality of those lives. Dzshike Street needs political activists, not poets.

In an intensely personal poem, *"A lid tsu mayn kleydershank"* ("A Poem to My Clothes Closet"), the poet lies awake at night, thinking about what to do with her *"broyne katsaveyke"* (jacket of brown quilt). Here Hellerstein takes a permissible, and even enhancing, liberty in her translation of the twice-repeated refrain, *"Lig ikh azoy in dveykes,"* as "Then I lie in devout, ecstatic guilt." According to Uriel Weinreich's modern English-Yiddish dictionary, *"dveykes"* literally means "religious ecstasy, attained by banishing all profane thoughts and communing with God." Kadya is acutely aware that in thinking about her jacket she has not banished, but rather indulged in, extremely profane and frivolous thoughts. Hellerstein's addition of "guilt" to rhyme with "brown quilt," underscores the self-mocking irony conveyed by that word and artfully links "A Poem to My Clothes Closet" to many other poems in *Dzshike Street* in which the poet juggles personal and political concerns."

In *In land fun mayn gebeyn* (*In the Country of My Bones*, Chicago, 1937), the first of her books written in America, Kadya grapples with yet another tension, that between home and exile. Although the New York Yiddish literary establishment received her well, Kadya nevertheless felt foreign and fragmented, sensing despairingly that there was little place for the Yiddish poet in a country where the language was "no more than a small corner" of the Jewish scene. Even the title reflects this alienation by implicitly posing the question of where the "country of my bones" is located: in the land of her birth, the country where she will be buried, or her own body, which remains with her throughout her wanderings?

Der meylekh Dovid aleyn iz geblibn (Only King David Remained), written during the war years and published in New York in 1946, is Molodowsky's response to the Holocaust and expresses an even greater sense of alienation and isolation. Hellerstein's new translation of the much anthologized *"Eyl khanun"* ("Merciful God") captures the mood of weariness, anger and profound despair that makes this one of the most powerful poems in Holocaust literature. In this sacred parody, the poet subverts the traditional relationship between the "merciful God" and His "chosen people," pleading with Him to "Choose another people,/Elect another./We are tired of death and dying,/We have no more prayers." Here, she is not only an angry prophet railing at a God who is far from merciful but also a bereft survivor confronting unspeakable grief.

Kadya is somewhat more optimistic in her final volume, *Likht fun dornboym (Light of the Thorn Bush)*, published in 1965 in Buenos Aires. As the title suggests, the bush in the wilderness continues to burn as the poet reexamines and strengthens her

Left to right: Molodwsky, Joseph Kerman, Joseph Opatoshu, (front, center), Isaac Bashevis Singer (back, center), Aaron Zeitlin, and Melech Ravich. Warsaw, late 1920s.

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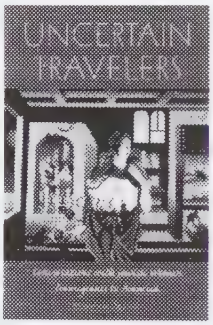

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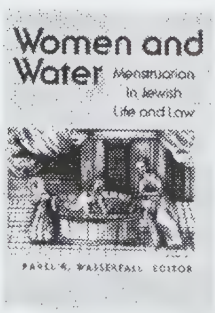

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tenuous connection to God. In the poem "And What Will Happen" Kadya broaches the issue of faith in the modern scientific era, and this time at least affirms its possibility. She poses the question,

> And what will happen
> When the fliers return
> And say there's no heaven out there?

Ultimately, she refuses to "believe the fliers." If heaven is not visible to skeptics intent only on considering rational evidence, it is visible to those who "stride across stairways of wonders," and turn their "eyes upward and higher."

In *"A polet"* (A Refugee), the final poem of the volume, Molodowsky seamlessly and even jauntily weaves together many of her passionate concerns—the Holocaust, messianic redemption, faith and Zionist activism. For Kadya, the birth of the Jewish state somewhat counterbalanced the tragedy of the Holocaust. In this poem, one of her many later poems on Israel, a young refugee, "Hollowed by hunger, without a shirt/Barefoot and frostbitten," makes his way to Jerusalem. Although the refugee meets the Messiah and Elijah the Prophet, ultimately it is a *kholets* (settler) who will guide him and Elijah into the Holy Land. "It's a long way to Jerusalem" but for the young refugee who has both faith and the desire to build the land with his own hands "the road is easy." There are miracles, Kadya seems to be saying, but ultimately, although perhaps inspired by God, they are wrought by man.

In *Paper Bridges,* Kadya emerges as a complex and diverse poet. Recognizing the constraints of being a Jewish woman, she refused in her literary and personal life to be limited by them. Eschewing most ideological solutions to Jewish problems, she forged her own path. Her poetry reveals a realist who longed for miracles, a philosophic thinker who tempered tragedy with irony and humor, and a spiritual seeker who despaired in God and humanity. Yet she could still be, as she says in "Dzshike Street," "in love with life." Her intellectual complexity was matched by technical virtuosity. Kadya's verse ranged from highly lyrical to quasi-conversational; with seemingly effortless grace she penned delicate rhymes and with daring she created others jarring or disarming.

It is no wonder that Hellerstein, who began with the more modest task of translating Molodowsky's first book *Nights of Heshvan,* soon found herself in love with her "cranky, tough, indulgent, gorgeous poems" and taking on her whole poetic oeuvre. This fortunate decision enables the English reader to appreciate the broad scope of Kadya's work and the extent of her poetic gifts. (The project of translating Kadya's memoirs, prose fiction, and journalism still remains.) Through her labor of love, Hellerstein has constructed another wonderful paper bridge, one over which the English reader can travel, if not into a messianic paradise, then, at least, into the world of a poet so central to a vanished era and yet so remarkably relevant today. ■

Sheva Zucker teaches Jewish literature and Yiddish at Duke University and is the author of a Yiddish textbook. She translates and writes about women in Yiddish literature.

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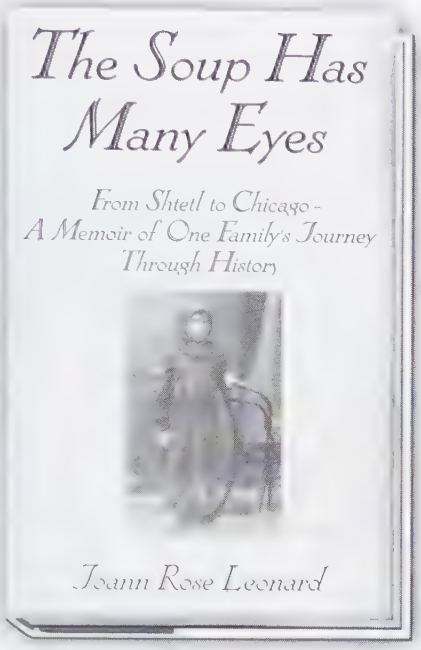

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edited by David L. Freeman and Judith Z. Abrams
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Moses' prayer for his sister Miriam shows how words can heal.

Judaism has always recognized the effects, both physical and spiritual, of illness. Torah, after all, is the first Jewish medical textbook and contains the first discussion of Jewish medical ethics. There, we can read detailed descriptions of diseases that may render an individual "unclean," as well as the basic rules of personal and communal hygiene; we can witness the visit of the angels to Abraham after his circumcision, an account of the first performance of *bikkur cholim*, the divine injunction to visit the sick; we can hear the simple prayer of Moses for his sister Miriam that demonstrates the power of words to heal. This historical understanding of the connection between the healing of body and soul can also be found in Talmud and other rabbinic texts, as well in the structure of the synagogue service; and in recent years, the Jewish Renewal movement has focused new attention on these rich and varied traditions in order to offer spiritual comfort and healing to those who are ill.

Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today is a comprehensive anthology of the various responses by Judaism and by individual Jews to the complex and often painful issues raised by physical illness, pain and suffering. In the preface, Rabbi Abrams, known for her web site offering Talmud study in a very egalitarian mode, and Dr. Freeman express the hope that "this anthology will prove useful to people who now suffer from major illness, and for their loved ones...for chaplains...caregivers...and anyone interested in the interconnection of medicine and religion." One hundred and twenty-seven selections from various texts, ranging from the Bible to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, from Talmud to Reb Nachman, from Maimonides to Sholem Asch, from Gluckel of Hameln to Max Lerner, are organized into seven categories ("Seeking Meaning in Suffering," "From Where Will My Help Come?," "The Sacredness of Health" and others), each with a very brief introduction.

Although, individually, almost every selection is well chosen and presents yet another facet of the Jewish tradition of illness and healing, the book's usefulness for the lay reader may be limited: Without an extended introduction that discusses the religious, ethical and spiritual underpinnings of these interpretations, the pieces may not all fit together into a comprehensive whole. It will more likely serve as a useful reference source for rabbis and others whose work focuses on issues of health and healing. In addition, although the author of each piece is briefly identified, little historical context is provided. Nevertheless, for those interested in exploring how we as a people have responded through the centuries to our human need for a "healing of body, the healing of spirit," this book provides a beginning. —*Tamara Green*

Tamara Green is Professor of Classics at Hunter College. She is a member of the Board of the National Center for Jewish Healing.

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continued from page 9

ten minutes—without stopping. What usually emerges is phenomenal. The first time we did it on "food." Of course, everyone wrote something different. But then, what woman doesn't have some issue with food? Another week we wrote on "balance." Also very interesting.

It's great to talk about the problems facing the "frail elderly" but what about folks like my parents and their contemporaries who at 92 are still going strong? I think they need to be looked upon as a new role model for those of us approaching old age.

Deborah Fuller
Ft. Lauderdale, FL

High Praise

Just got the new issue in the mail and having read almost every word of the first nine pages I can tell you it's better than ever — and I've yet to crack the main section and the intriguing feature stories.

Thanks for the mention of my Daily News piece and the fax campaign to Barak [encouraging him to keep his promise and appoint more women to his cabinet], but thanks most of all for continually producing a superlative magazine.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin
New York, NY

Fertile Foremother

I'm now in Jerusalem studying for the year, and Lilith may be the most popular periodical in the HUC-JIR library (past issues are kept behind the desk because they tend to grow legs and walk off by themselves!).

One error: Karen Paul-Stern's review of Nina Cardin's latest book says that all the matriarchs had trouble conceiving. Our foremother Leah should not be in that category. According to tradition, Leah's fertility was the cause of friction between Leah and Rachel.

Linda Steigman
Jerusalem, Israel

Scholarly Source

Pegah Hendizadeh Shiffman's article on the impact of negotiating dual cultures on Persian-American-Jewish young women ("How Najeeb Are You?," Winter 1999) was derived from her senior research paper in the Women's Studies program at Brandeis University. For more information about the original version please e-mail her at pegah_schiffman@yahoo.com.

Professor Shulamit Reinharz
Waltham, Massachusetts
(The author is director of Women's Studies at Brandeis University.)

'We'? 'They'?

Alice Sparberg Alexiou's "The Golden Ghetto's Shame" (Fall 1999), was a refreshing admission of a truth about the more common relationship between Blacks and Jews. I am a Jew, I live and work among Jews, but I am also an African-American who lived through events like those described in her article. I found Alexiou's honesty and self-reflection liberating. Here was someone Jewish who was willing to admit that a current of racism against

continued on page 45

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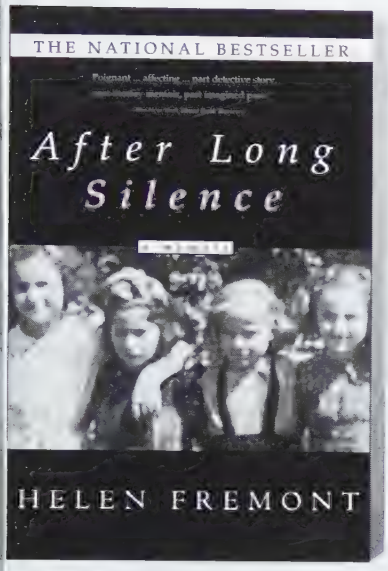

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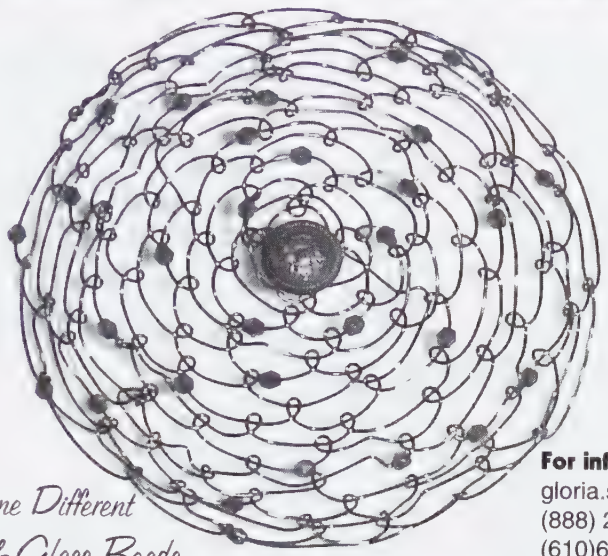

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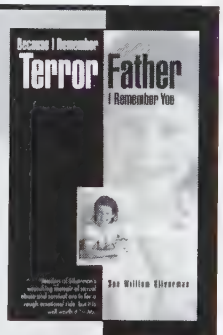

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continued from page 42

Blacks exists among the most liberal of middle-class Jews.

My personal experience has been that Jews as a group may have been vaguely sympathetic to Black civil rights. Yet, the Jews we dealt with on any kind of personal level were in general an entirely different story. My mama was Mrs. Brodsky's maid, and however kindly mistress may have been, their relationship was 'maid' to 'woman of the house'—a distinct imbalance in the power relationship.

For many other Blacks the only Jews they knew were the ones who owned stores in their neighborhoods. The Jewish slumlord may have been a stereotype, but some Jews did fit the description. Most Blacks did not tangibly experience or benefit from Jewish largesse to our social and charitable organizations, while many Blacks of the era remember that for the most part Jews did not treat us that much differently than rest of White America did.

I am personally pained that anti-Semitism has become casually accepted among my Black brothers and sisters. Yet because of my personal intimacy with Jewish racism, I feel less grateful to the Jews who marched and sang and died for the ideal (as yet unrealized) of Black equality than angry over the psychological scars Jewish racism has embedded in my own life.

Janice Fleming Berg
Plainsboro, New Jersey

Your profile on Hadassah's Check it Out program ("Breasts — Check Them Out," Fall 1999) was excellent, but your implication that the New Me is not successful in teaching self-esteem is premature. The program seeks to affect the long-term behavior of girls, which takes more than a one-hour seminar. That's why Hadassah works with the teachers as well as the students.

Bonnie Lipton
New York, NY
(The author is Hadassah's National President.)

Corrections:

The material in Haviva Ner-David's article in the Winter issue of LILITH, "Will She Be the First Orthodox Woman Rabbi?" was adapted from her book Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Towards Traditional Rabbinic Ordination *(JFL Books, www.JFLBooks.com). She is studying for rabbinic ordination with Rabbi Aryeh Strikovsky in Jerusalem and is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at Bar Ilan University.*

Ellen Kushner's CD "Welcoming Children Into the World," created by WGBH and Rykodisc, is available for sale on the "Sound and Spirit" website www.wgbh.org/pri/spirit. The site was misprinted in our Winter issue.

The Pauline Wengeroff passage quoted in Rachel Josefowitz Siegel's "Taking Care" (Winter 1999) came from Shulamith Magnus' translation in Memoirs of the Grandmother: Scenes from the Cultural Life of Russian Jewry in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 1, *and was quoted by permission from the University of California Press.* ■

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The Rennert Women in Judaism Forum
Spring 2000 Events

Israeli Feminism 2000:
A Report from the Field
a lecture with
MARCIA FREEDMAN
Israeli feminist and former member of Knesset
6:30 PM
Thursday, 30 March
Altshul Atrium, Altschul Hall

Jewish Orthodoxy, Tradition & Art:
Contemporary Feminist Responses
a panel discussion with
novelist PEARL ABRAHAM
visual artist HELENE AYLON
scholar and activist NORMA JOSEPH
Moderated by IRENE KLEPFISZ
6:30 PM
Thursday, 6 April
405 Milbank Hall

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Your Writing Here

Babes in Goyland, a website for Jewesses on the Loose, describes itself as "an online community for young Jewish women with attitude." Want to write for them? They're looking for submissions 250-1200 words long. Contributors should review Ophira Edut's current Babes in Goyland website *www.ophira.com/jewgirl* prior to submitting queries or work to: *Brian Zumhagen; c/o Urban Box Office Network, 601 W. 26th St., 12th flr., New York, NY 10001; (212)706-3400; fax (212)691-2828; brianz@ubo.net*

When the Prophet is a Sister. For a forthcoming anthology, *The Paradoxes of Miriam*, re-examining this important yet elusive figure (the sister of Moses, but she never got the play that he did) and her role in Jewish culture, send feminist, revisionist, or non-traditional perspectives—poems, fiction, prose midrash, essays, meditations—with SASE by 12/1/00 to *Enid Dame, P.O. Box 455, High Falls, NY 12440.*

The Jewish Women's Poetry Workshop sponsored by the Jewish Women's Resource Center of NCJW New York Section has moved. Jewish women poets and women who like to listen to poetry are invited to come the first Tuesday of every month, 6:30-9PM, *NCJW, 241 W. 72nd Street, New York, NY; Henny Wenkart, (212)751-9223.*

Jewish Fabulist Fiction: fables, fantasy, myths, magical realism. Send your short story by June 30, for an international anthology to be published by Invisible Cities Press of Montpelier, VT. Sephardi/Mizrahi-themed work encouraged. Send SASE for guidelines to: *D. Jaffee, 57 Broadlawn Park, #26A, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467; Danya40@aol.com*

Transformations: A Resource for Curriculum Transformation and Scholarship, a journal, assists teachers and scholars at all levels who are committed to integrating recent scholarship on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other identity positions. They'll take papers from a variety of approaches, from theoretical essays to short descriptions of pedagogical innovations; *Ellen G. Friedman, Women's and Gender Studies, The College of New Jersey, PO Box 7718, Ewing, NJ 08628-0718; (609)771-2539; (609)637-5164; http://transformations.tcnj.edu*

Your Input Needed

Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement: for a documentary film, seeking women to interview. Please contact *Elizabeth Zitron, (573)441-8279; zitrone@missouri.edu; (see also LILITH's article "Unsung Heroines of the '60s: Jewish Women Who Went South" [Fall 1999].)*

Exhibits

Picture This! An exhibit of children's book illustrations from recent books on Jewish themes features the work of Michelle Edwards, Jane Breskin Zalben, Malcah Zeldis and others. Captions for the 40 original illustrations were written by fifth and sixth grade students from three local

Illustration from *Blessed Are You* by Michelle Edwards.

schools. Through September 2000 at *National Museum of American Jewish History, 55 North 5th St., Independence Mall East, Philadelphia, PA 19106-2197; (215)923-3811; fax (215)923-0763; www.nmajh.org*

Faith: The Impact of Judeo-Christian Religion on Art at the Millennium includes works by Helene Aylon, Maria Marshall, Diane Samuels,

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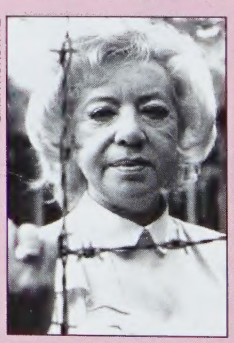
Maria Marshall, 1999, still image from *I'm not going to die easily*

among others. Through May 29 at the *Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, 258 Main Street, Ridgefield CT 06877; (203)438-4519; fax (203)438-0198; www.aldrichart.org*

Teen Photographers Take Tel Aviv and Los Angeles. In a celebration of Tel Aviv's 90th birthday, an exhibition showing simultaneously in both cities promotes understanding between two communities and presents artistic and youthful visions. Sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. March 19-April 16, 2000 at the *Finegood Art Gallery of the Jewish Federation/Valley Alliance, Bernard Milken Campus, 22622 Vanowen St., West Hills, CA 91307; (818)464-3218;* May 7-July 7 at the *Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049; (310)440-4500; fax (310)440-4595;* and in the summer at *the Tel Aviv Museum, Shderot Shaul Hamelekh 27, 64239 Tel Aviv, Israel; (972-3)695-7361.*

Among Danish Jews: a photographic portrait of a community today by Linda Horowitz is one part of an exhibit on "A Light Among Nations: The Danish and the Jews" on view through May 5 at the *William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring St. NW, Atlanta GA 30309; (404)873-1661; fax (404)881-4009.*



LINDA HOROWITZ

Mikveh & Niddah Observance: Your recollections and information about experiences in the United States prior to and through the 1940s sought for a doctoral dissertation in American Jewish history by *Jane Rothstein, Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University, 53 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012; jr231@is5.nyu.edu.*

Read

Jerusalem Women's Voices, a bi-annual English-language Israeli feminist publication edited by former Knesset Member Marcia Freedman, is sent to supporters of Kol Ha-Isha, the Jerusalem Women's Center, whose goal is to represent feminists from many different communities in Israel. In the current issue, Israeli poet and cultural worker Brachi Seri describes being a girl in Yemen; activist Yvonne Deutsch recalls her childhood as an immigrant from Hungary; and political scientist Henriette Dahan-Kalev analyzes the tension between Mizrachi and Ashkenazi feminists. Tax-deductible contributions can be directed to Kol Ha-Isha via the *New Israel Fund (POB 91588, Washington, DC 20090)* or *U.S./Israel Women to Women (275 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10001)*; or directly to *Kol Ha-Isha, POB 37157, Jerusalem 91371, Israel. kolisha@netmedia.net.il.*

Sh'ma on Feminism. In January the Jewish intellectual journal offered reflections by Tamara Cohen, Daniel Gordis, Blu Greenberg, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Gail Twersky Reimer and others. Available from *Jewish Family & Life, 56 Kearney Rd. #B, Needham, MA 02494; (781)449-9894; www.Shma.com*

Vital Signs is a manual for using poetry and teaching writing in hospitals, healing centers, therapeutic groups and crisis centers. Funded by the Witter Bynner Foundation, the project that developed this free book was directed by poet Davi Walders in cooperation with Dr. Lori Wiener and Gil Brown from *The Children's Inn at NIH, 7 West Dr., Bethesda, MD 20814-1509; (301)496-5672; fax (301)496-4421.*

Seven Tzedakah Ideas for Shabbat draw on ancient teachings about each person's responsiblity to share what they have. This is the second in the series of Torah of Money education cards about doing *tzedakah* in connection with Jewish holidays. The first card is "Eight Ideas for Hanukkah Gelt." *The Shefa Fund, 805 East Willow Grove Ave., #2D; Wyndmoor, PA 19038; (215)247-9704; fax (215)247-1015; info@shefafund.org*

All in Our Family

Zahal B is a website for gay, lesbian and bisexual Israeli youth, ages 15-22, that provides information and lists weekly social meetings led by trained youth leaders in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (other groups forming), where individuals can meet and talk about common issues in a comfortable atmosphere. *http://members.xoom.com/zahalb/*

Openly gay, deeply Jewish. Encompassing the whole range of Jewish and gay Jewish experience, this Lehrhaus Judaica offered over 40 classes and had 500 participants in its first year of classes 1998-99. Request a free course catalog from this first of about 30 synagogues in the US to openly welcome gay and lesbian members. *Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, 57 Bethune St., New York, NY 10014; (212)929-9498; fax (212)620-3154; www.cbst.org*

Lesbian Mothering is the theme of the most recent issue of the Association for Research on Mothering Journal; 2000 will bring issues on "Mothers and Sons" and "Mothering in the African Diaspora." Members receive bi-annual newsletter, information mailings, conferences and subscription to the ARM Journal. Individuals $55; institutions $75. *ARM, Atkinson College, York University, 4700 Keele St, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3; (416)736-2100 x60366, arm@yorku.ca, fax: (905)775-1386*

Listen

Is this print too small, or not visible at all, to you or someone you know? We are delighted to announce that beginning with this issue the The Jewish Braille Institute will be recording Lilith and will make it available free of charge to anyone who is blind or visually impaired. If you would like to receive Lilith on tape call the toll free number for the Jewish Braille Institute of America, 110 E. 30th Street, New York, NY 10016; (800)433-1531 or (212)889-2525 and ask for the Library.

Faith Matters, hosted by Maureen Fiedler, is a radio talk show designed to provided "spirited conversation" about the religious issues that shape our times and public policy and to challenge the dominance of the religious right in radio broadcasting. Produced by the eponymous nonprofit corporation, affiliated with the Quixote Center of Brentwood, MD, it airs Sundays, 10-11 a.m. EST, on these stations: *KWAB 1490 AM, Boulder, CO; WWDB 860 AM, Philadelphia, PA; KFNX 1100 AM, Phoenix, AZ; WALE; 990 AM, Providence, RI.*

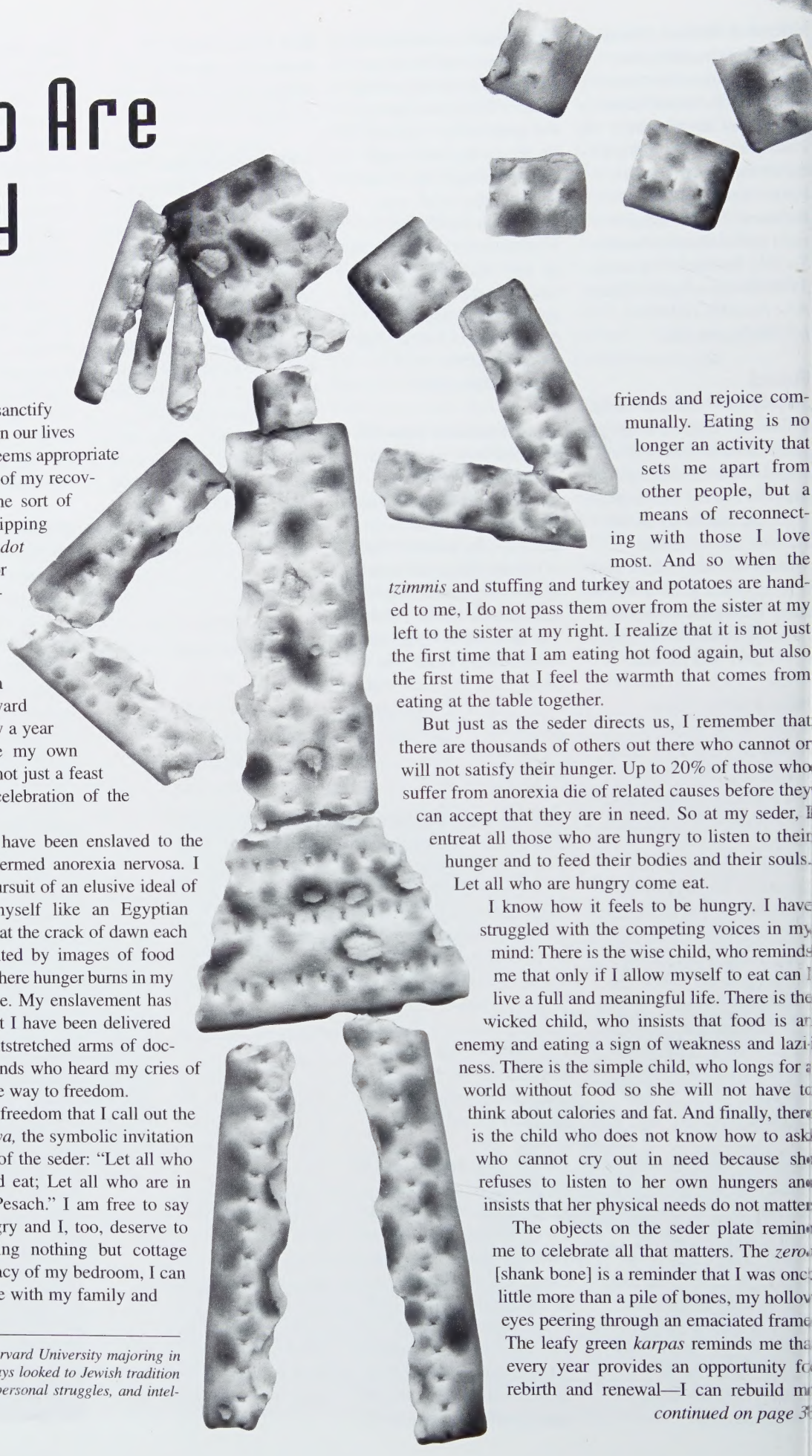
Million Mom March Mothers Day 2000 is calling on Congress to enact common sense gun control legislation by May 14, and plans a march in Washington DC to celebrate, or to protest bipartisan ineptitude. They endorse: sensible cooling-off periods to acquire a purchased gun, background checks, licensing handgun owners, registering all handguns, safety locks for all handguns, limiting purchases to one handgun per month and no-nonsense enforcement of gun laws. *(888)989-MOMS; nyc@millionmommarch.com; www.millionmommarch.com*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

When you help these other worthy organizations, please consider a tax-deductible contribution to LILITH, a crucial vehicle of communication and connection for Jewish women. Mail a contribution to LILITH, 250 W. 57th St. #2432, New York, NY 10107; Call 1-888-2-LILITH or fax 212-757-5705 to contribute by credit card. Thank you!

All Who Are Hungry

by Ilana Kurshan



Judaism teaches us to sanctify the significant moments in our lives with rituals, and thus it seems appropriate to me to mark the beginning of my recovery from anorexia with some sort of rite of passage. While flipping through our family *haggadot* last spring in preparation for Passover, I was struck by several parallels between the symbols and images of the seder and my own emotions as I come to develop a more healthy attitude toward food and eating. Now, nearly a year later, I am ready to create my own seder—a seder that will be not just a feast of freedom, but a joyous celebration of the freedom to feast once again.

For nearly two years, I have been enslaved to the insidious illness clinically termed anorexia nervosa. I have tortured my body in pursuit of an elusive ideal of thinness; I have driven myself like an Egyptian taskmaster to run five miles at the crack of dawn each morning; I have been haunted by images of food pyramids in a strange land where hunger burns in my body yet I dare not consume. My enslavement has been cruel and isolating, but I have been delivered by the strong hands and outstretched arms of doctors, nurses, family and friends who heard my cries of suffering and showed me the way to freedom.

It is with this newfound freedom that I call out the words of the *ha lachma anya,* the symbolic invitation recited near the beginning of the seder: "Let all who are hungry come enter and eat; Let all who are in need come and celebrate Pesach." I am free to say that I, too, have been hungry and I, too, deserve to eat. After months of eating nothing but cottage cheese and fruit in the privacy of my bedroom, I can now gather around the table with my family and friends and rejoice communally. Eating is no longer an activity that sets me apart from other people, but a means of reconnecting with those I love most. And so when the *tzimmis* and stuffing and turkey and potatoes are handed to me, I do not pass them over from the sister at my left to the sister at my right. I realize that it is not just the first time that I am eating hot food again, but also the first time that I feel the warmth that comes from eating at the table together.

But just as the seder directs us, I remember that there are thousands of others out there who cannot or will not satisfy their hunger. Up to 20% of those who suffer from anorexia die of related causes before they can accept that they are in need. So at my seder, I entreat all those who are hungry to listen to their hunger and to feed their bodies and their souls. Let all who are hungry come eat.

I know how it feels to be hungry. I have struggled with the competing voices in my mind: There is the wise child, who reminds me that only if I allow myself to eat can I live a full and meaningful life. There is the wicked child, who insists that food is an enemy and eating a sign of weakness and laziness. There is the simple child, who longs for a world without food so she will not have to think about calories and fat. And finally, there is the child who does not know how to ask, who cannot cry out in need because she refuses to listen to her own hungers and insists that her physical needs do not matter.

The objects on the seder plate remind me to celebrate all that matters. The *zero[a]* [shank bone] is a reminder that I was once little more than a pile of bones, my hollow eyes peering through an emaciated frame. The leafy green *karpas* reminds me that every year provides an opportunity for rebirth and renewal—I can rebuild my

continued on page 3[illegible]

Ilana Kurshan is a senior at Harvard University majoring in History of Science. She has always looked to Jewish tradition to bridge scientific knowledge, personal struggles, and intellectual insights.